

**THIS IS NOT A DRILL: EDUCATION-RELATED
RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN THE WAKE OF
NATURAL DISASTERS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY,
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

AND LABOR

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**THIS IS NOT A DRILL: EDUCATION-RELATED
RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN THE WAKE
OF NATURAL DISASTERS**

**Wednesday, June 5, 2019
House of Representatives,
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education,
Committee on Education and Labor,
Washington, DC.**

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9 a.m., in room 2176, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Sablan, Schrier, Hayes, Shalala, Davis, Morelle, Scott, Allen, Thompson, Grothman, Taylor, Timmons, and Foxx.

Staff present: Tylease Alli, Chief Clerk; Nekea Brown, Deputy Clerk; Paula Daneri, Education Policy Fellow; Emma Eatman, Press Assistant; Christian Haines, General Counsel, Education; Ariel Jona, Staff Assistant; Stephanie Lalle, Deputy Communications Director; Max Moore, Office Aide; Jacque Mosely, Director of Education Policy; Veronique Pluviose, Staff Director; Lakeisha Steele, Professional Staff; Loredana Valtierra, Education Policy Fellow; Banyon Vassar, Deputy Director of Information Technology; Adrienne Rolie Webb, Education Policy Fellow; Courtney Butcher, Minority Director of Coalitions and Members Services; Amy Raaf Jones, Minority, Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Hannah Matesic, Minority Director of Operations; Kelley McNabb, Minority Communications Director; Casey Nelson, Minority Staff Assistant; Mandy Schaumburg, Minority Chief Counsel and Deputy Director of Education Policy; Meredith Schellin, Minority Deputy Press Secretary and Digital Advisor; and Brad Thomas, Minority Senior Education Policy Advisor.

Chairman SABLAN. Good morning. The committee on Education and Labor will come to order. Welcome, everyone. I note that a quorum is present, and the committee is meeting today in a legislative hearing to hear testimony on This is Not a Drill, Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural Disasters.

Pursuant to committee rule 7(c), opening statements are limited to the chair and the ranking member. This allows us to hear more from our witnesses sooner and provides all members with adequate time to ask questions.

A small note. This hearing was scheduled before we knew that this was going to be a short week. Votes will be called at 10, and Members will go to vote. And Mr. Allen has agreed to come back and continue the hearing so we can hear every witness testify.

So I now recognize myself for making an opening statement. Today we are here to examine the Federal Government's response to school communities impacted by natural disasters and the diverse challenges our schools face on the road to recovery. We need to know what has gone right, what has gone wrong, and what needs to improve for the sake of our children and their schools because we do know that it is a question of when, not if, the next storm will hit.

Our distinguished witnesses will share their harrowing experience rebuilding communities in the wake of some of our country's most devastating and recent natural disasters. We also have an opportunity to hear directly from the Education Department, the Secretary is here, about their role in helping these communities recover.

Just last October, super Typhoon Yutu devastated my own district, the Northern Marianas. Unfortunately, despite being the most powerful storm in the world that year and the worst American storm since 1935, Yutu received minimal media coverage or even mentions in the President's Twitter feed unlike other storms did.

However, Mr. Secretary, I do appreciate Secretary DeVos' phone call to me just days after Yutu with her pledge of support for Marianas school, teachers, and students. Secretary DeVos followed through on her pledge by releasing \$1.1 million in project served grant funds in January for the Marianas public school system, but our students will need much more Federal support to restore proper school facilities for the over 900 Hopwood Middle School students whose campus was totally destroyed by Yutu and are still learning in FEMA built tents.

Despite many families being displaced and even losing their homes, I am inspired by the strength and resilience of our students. Their perseverance is reflected in the 900 high school seniors who will receive their diplomas next week, I will say, with many planning to attend college or serve their country in the military. Their perseverance has shown through the Marianas high school students I met who won the right to represent the Marianas in the congressional App Challenge for the second year in a row.

This year's congressional Art Competition winner, Miss Julia Theresa Malate's artwork, "Marianas Strong" shows the strength of the people of the Marianas after Super Typhoon Yutu devastated our islands. The U.S. Virgin Islands, USVI and Puerto Rico, were also devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. In the U.S. Virgin Islands it took 5 weeks for affected public schools to finally reopen. Over a year later, these reopened schools continued to struggle with damage, physical, and technological infrastructure.

While this committee extended an invitation to our friends in Puerto Rico to testify, we were disappointed they could not join us today. Thank you.

In response to these disasters, Congress has thrice approved funding to provide relief to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands,

yet very little of the most helpful education and disaster relief funding has been spent, and FEMA has not started rebuilding schools.

Elsewhere in our country, California was also devastated by natural disasters. Over the last 2 years, California has been ravaged by the State's worst wildfires in history, killing over 100 people, destroying nearly 20,000 homes, and cutting off schooling for thousands of students for weeks. In total, 12 schools were destroyed, and 14 schools were damaged.

Beyond the damage the wildfires caused to infrastructure, air quality was severely impacted. The teachers union in Oakland Unified School District, asked that masks be provided for all students and teachers if district officials did not close the schools.

School communities in the Marianas, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Northern California face unique challenges recovering from natural disasters. Yet, a common thread across this crisis is a Federal Government that refuses to put people before politics and acknowledge the impact climate change has on communities where still up to this week, Republican lawmakers repeatedly blocked passage of a key funding bill to assist communities recovering from Super Typhoon Yutu, the Northern California wildfires, Hurricane Maria, and other recent disasters.

The \$19 billion disaster relief package includes \$165 million to address recovery-related educational needs. The bill also mandates GAO audits, an investigation that would further assist this committee's work to oversee and improve the Federal Government's disaster response.

While we may disagree on our assessments of Federal responses to natural disaster, the underlying crisis we face is undeniable. Climate change caused by human activities has worsened natural disasters and made emergency preparedness in schools more difficult. As climate change continues to intensify, the Federal Government's responsibility to provide school communities with the resources to recover from natural disaster is more important now than ever before.

Today's hearing is a critical first step toward ensuring that students, families, and school staff can rely on the Federal Government to help them not only recover from natural disasters but actually emerge stronger.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today, and I now yield to my friend and ranking member, Mr. Allen, for his opening statement.

[The statement of Chairman Sablan follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, Chairman,
Subcommittee Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education**

Today, we are here to examine the Federal Government's response to school communities impacted by natural disasters and the diverse challenges our schools face on the road to recovery. We need to know what has gone right, what has gone wrong, and what needs to improve for the sake of our children and their schools. Because we do know that it is a question of when, not if, the next storm will hit.

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Secretary DeVos' followed through on her pledge by releasing \$1.1 million in Project SERV grant funds in January for the Marianas Public School System. But our students will need much more Federal support to restore proper school facilities for the over 900 Hopwood Middle School students whose campus was totally destroyed by Yutu and are still learning in FEMA-built tents.

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The U.S. Virgin Islands, or USVI, and Puerto Rico were also devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. In USVI, it took 5 weeks for affected public schools to finally reopen. Over a year later, these reopened schools continue to struggle with damaged physical and technological infrastructure.

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Beyond the damage the wildfires caused to infrastructure, air quality was severely impacted. The teachers' union in Oakland Unified School District asked that masks be provided for all students and teachers if district officials did not close the schools.

School communities in the Marianas, Puerto Rico, USVI, and Northern California face unique challenges to recovering from natural disasters. Yet, the common thread across these crises is a Federal Government that refuses to put people before politics and acknowledge the impact climate change has on communities.

Worse still, until this week, Republican lawmakers repeatedly blocked passage of a key funding bill to assist communities recovering from Super Typhoon Yutu, the Northern California wildfires, Hurricane Maria, and other recent disasters. The \$19 billion disaster relief package includes \$165 million to address recovery-related educational needs. The bill also mandates GAO audits and investigations that will further assist this committee's work to oversee and improve the Federal Government's disaster response.

While we may disagree in our assessments of Federal responses to natural disasters, the underlying crisis we face is undeniable: climate change caused by human activities has worsened natural disasters and made emergency preparedness in schools more difficult. As climate change continues to intensify, the Federal Government's responsibility to provide school communities with the resources to recover from natural disasters is more important now than ever before.

Today's hearing is a critical first step toward ensuring that students, families, and school staff can rely on the Federal Government to help them not only recover from natural disasters but emerge stronger.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today and I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Allen, for his opening statement.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for yielding.

You know, we sometimes forget that when a natural disaster strikes an area, it doesn't discriminate what it destroys in its path. Schools are central gathering places, and they are just as a vulner-

able as homes, businesses, and churches when a natural disaster hits our communities.

Hurricanes and fires, like the ones that have devastated the U.S. in recent years, demolish school buildings and displace thousands of students, forcing communities to scramble to rebuild.

When Congress provides disaster aid, making sure that this funding is used well is critical to the successful and efficient renewal of America's destroyed schools. The Department must also assure it will support technical assistance, regulatory flexibility, and other measures to allow State and local leaders the resources necessary to rebuild after a natural disaster and serve students in their communities.

There are no better witnesses to ask about the struggles of rebuilding schools after natural disasters than local and State education leaders. They are best suited to brief Congress on the challenges that come with reconstruction and the success and areas for improvement in the Department of Education in support of disaster relief efforts.

I look forward to this hearing and to working with my colleagues to ensure that schools are not forgotten in the aftermath of natural disasters. We can't always fully prepare for a destructive storm or fire, but we should be doing all we can to make the returning of America's children to school as seamless as possible. Thank you, and I yield back.

[The statement of Mr. Allen follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick W. Allen, Ranking Member,
Subcommittee Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education**

We sometimes forget, that when a natural disaster strikes an area, it doesn't discriminate what it destroys in its path. Schools are central gathering places and they are just as vulnerable as homes, businesses, and churches when a natural disaster hits our communities. Hurricanes and fires, like the ones that have devastated the U.S. in recent years, demolished school buildings and displaced thousands of students, forcing communities to scramble to rebuild.

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Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Allen.

And without objection, all other members who wish to insert written statements into the record may do so by submitting them to the committee clerk electronically in Microsoft Word format by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, June 19.

And now I would like to introduce our witness for the first panel. Mr. Frank Brogan serves as the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the United States Department of Education. Secretary Brogan most recently served as Chancellor of

Pennsylvania's public universities. I couldn't help but noticing you and Dr. Shalala giving each other bear hugs.

He began his career as a fifth grade teacher in Martin County, Florida, and later served as a dean of students, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent before being elected Florida's Commissioner of Education in 1994.

Mr. Brogan continued his advocacy for public education when he was selected to serve as Lieutenant Governor of Florida in 1998 and 2002. After 5 years in that role, he was named President of Florida Atlantic University, a position he held until 2009 when he was selected to serve as Chancellor of Florida's public universities.

We appreciate all the witnesses for being here today and look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written statements, and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Pursuant to committee rule 7(d) and committee practice, each of you is asked to limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written statement. Let me remind the witnesses that pursuant to Title 18 of the U.S. Code, Section 1001, it is illegal to knowingly and willfully falsify any statement, representation, writing, document, or material fact presented to Congress or otherwise conceal or cover up a material fact.

Before you begin your testimony, please remember to push the button on the microphone in front of you so that it will turn on and the members can hear you. They have to push the button to turn on the lights too.

But as you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow to signal that you have 1 minute remaining. When the lights turn red, your 5 minutes have expired, and we ask that you please wrap up. When answering a question, please remember to once again turn your microphone on.

I now welcome and recognize Assistant Secretary Brogan for his oral statement. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF FRANK BROGAN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. BROGAN. How's that? Thank you. The lights were easier, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you all very much, Mr. Chairman, and again, ranking member, and members for giving me the opportunity to be with you and the committee members today, and thank you for the opportunity to share how the Department of Education does work very hard to help students, their families, and their communities and States and territories recover from natural disasters.

In 2017, hurricanes in Florida, Texas, Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands, and wildfires in California disrupted far too many learning environments for students and teachers. Those of us at the Department of Education were, indeed, moved to minimize impacts on students of all ages, their teachers, and their schools, and we continue to support communities as they work to reopen schools and restore learning environments.

Secretary DeVos, as mentioned, and other senior Department officials traveled to each of the hurricane-impacted areas in the fall of 2017 to see firsthand the damage to affected schools. More than a dozen Department staff participated in the outreach efforts, informed initial cost estimates, developed legislative options, helped to prepare an official White House request to Congress for assistance, and technical assistance to Congress to help develop legislation.

Secretary DeVos immediately made available financial assistance through the Department's Project Serve program which helps restore learning environments in affected areas. She provided grants of \$2 million each to the United States Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Texas, and California with the goal of jump starting high priority relief efforts to supplement the forthcoming congressional action on comprehensive disaster recovery legislation.

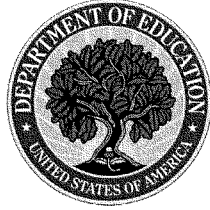
In early 2018, Congress provided \$2.7 billion dollars to fund a comprehensive set of education-related disaster recovery programs, and the Department quickly moved to implement this appropriation. To date, we have awarded nearly \$1.4 billion under five programs designed in this effort to make certain that people have the available funds to do the jobs that they must do in the world of recovery.

I also personally visited Puerto Rico in the summer of 2018 following my confirmation as Assistant Secretary, and by that time, students were already back in school. That didn't mean everything was back to normal. Many of the windows were still boarded up, many of the buildings were still without air conditioning, and many of the students were still homeless as well as staff members. Yet I refused to forget the smiling faces of those children. Despite their challenges, they are still children, always hopeful when it comes to their futures.

Our team remains in regular contact with students and education leaders in affected areas. We created the Hurricane Help web page to make available key resources including information on the many flexibilities in using Federal taxpayer funds and various waivers made available. We provided funds to States like Florida and \$2 million to States like California for the 2018 wildfires. And we are working to improve our ability to provide timely resources, high quality support, and appropriate oversight of Federal taxpayer funds with the creation in the Department of Education of a new disaster recovery unit. This new five-person team will be devoted full time to managing current and future disaster response efforts including the development of in-house expertise to leverage Department resources and partner effectively with other Federal agencies. Our goal remains to support students, their families, their teachers, and their communities affected by natural disasters.

We thank you once again for providing us an opportunity to discuss this very important and, indeed, timely issue, and Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, I do look forward to answering any questions that you all might have this morning.

[The statement of Mr. Brogan follows:]



House Committee on Education and Labor

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery
in the Wake of Natural Disasters
June 5, 2019

Frank Brogan
Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education

Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen, and other Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share what the U.S. Department of Education has done and continues to do to help States, Territories, school districts, and schools respond and recover in the aftermath of natural disasters. We will also share what we have learned from recent efforts.

In 2017, natural disasters and, more specifically Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, followed by wildfires in California, had an historic impact. Nearly 47 million people, fifteen percent of the U.S. population, were impacted. These disasters were devastating to individuals, families, and communities across the country, in both affected and secondary areas, as disaster survivors were displaced from their homes.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria brought extraordinary destruction and displacement to families and communities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including disruption to public and private elementary and secondary schools and postsecondary institutions not seen since Hurricane Katrina.

Like the rest of the Nation, officials at the Department of Education were greatly saddened by this catastrophic loss and destruction, and deeply concerned about the potential impact on students of all ages, their teachers, and educational facilities. We also were convinced we had both the determination and the tools to pitch in and provide the immediate and long-term assistance needed to re-open schools and restore the learning environment in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, California and other areas impact by these disasters. The rapid succession of these disasters required government and private organizations to make significant contributions in time and resources.

Our initial efforts to monitor and assess damage, conduct outreach to affected areas, and estimate recovery costs were led by Robert S. Eitel, a senior Department official who had lived in New Orleans through Hurricane Katrina, and Joe Conaty, a career civil servant and the then-Acting Deputy Secretary who had served at the Department during that catastrophe. They knew firsthand how important it was to let victims know help was on the way. We had a blueprint

drawn from the Katrina experience, including relevant statutory waiver authorities, legislation and programs adopted, and cost estimation models. And we were able to call on the services of key career staff who had helped administer Education's successful hurricane recovery efforts following Katrina.

We quickly assembled an internal emergency response team, consisting of a dedicated team of political and career staff who met roughly three times weekly during October and November of 2017. This team conducted dozens of calls with education officials in affected States, Territories, and communities, and collected information on damage to schools and the movement of students and families following the disasters. This emergency response team continues to meet every other week and its members are in regular contact with officials from areas impacted by disasters of 2017, as well as those areas affected by disasters that occurred in 2018 and 2019. We also created the [Hurricane Help Web Page](#) to provide a wide range of disaster response and recovery resources for schools and school systems, including guidance on flexibility and waivers for grantees and program participants impacted by federally declared disasters.

Importantly, we took action to support the provision of concrete financial assistance for education recovery efforts. We prepared cost estimates, drafted legislative options, worked with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the White House to help prepare an official request to Congress for assistance, and provided extensive technical assistance to Congress to help enact legislation. Department staff also consulted extensively with representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help promote effective coordination of planned education recovery activities. At the headquarters level, Mr. Conaty represented ED at frequent meetings of the Recovery Support Function Leadership Group (RSFLG), hosted by FEMA. The RSFLG helps coordinate the recovery activities of over 25 Federal agencies organized by Recovery Support Function (RSF): Health and Social Services (for which ED is a primary agency), Housing, Natural and Cultural Resources, Economic, Infrastructure Systems, and Community Planning and Capacity Building. At the field level, ED also sent field representatives to work at the Joint Field Office (JFO) in Puerto Rico to help ensure federal interagency coordination on recovery.

In the meantime, Secretary DeVos and then-Acting Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, Jason Botel visited each of the hurricane-impacted areas in the fall of 2017. The Secretary deployed more than a dozen Department staff to go to impacted areas as part of the Department of Homeland Security's Surge Capacity Force across Florida, Puerto Rico, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Secretary DeVos also tapped the Department's existing Project School Emergency Response to Violence – Project SERV – a program that supports immediate assistance to school districts and institutions of higher education in which the learning environment has been disrupted due to a violent or traumatic crisis – to support affected communities. Historically, Project SERV awards are most often under \$500,000, in recognition of both the limited role of the program – getting students and teachers back in school rather than rebuilding damaged facilities—and the limited funding available – just \$5 million a year. However, the Secretary also can make larger awards to States following major disasters. In the fall of 2017, she provided grants of \$2 million each to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Texas, and California, with the goal of jump-starting high-priority relief efforts prior to Congressional action on comprehensive disaster recovery legislation.

In the summer of 2018, shortly after my confirmation as Assistant Secretary, I visited Puerto Rico. I vividly remember visiting a school in Yabucoa, one of the hardest hit areas of the Commonwealth. Dedicated school officials and parents were committed to educating students. Going to school was and continues to be – after the hurricane – an important routine for the students and their families. I spoke with many parents who routinely volunteer in this particular school and who helped clean and repair this school immediately following the storm. The resiliency of the students, parents, and teachers is remarkable and cannot be emphasized enough. But they continue to face significant challenges.

We are very proud, and I think justifiably so, of these initial efforts by the Department, its leadership, and staff to assist students, families, schools, and postsecondary institutions affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the California wildfires of 2017. However, we recognize that in many ways these efforts merely helped set the table for effective

implementation of Public Law 115-123, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (BBA), which provided the Department \$2.7 billion to fund a comprehensive set of disaster recovery programs authorized by the BBA. Under the BBA, the Department has awarded the following grants to date that support State and local recovery efforts for covered 2017 disasters:

- Nearly \$800 million to a total of four States, Puerto Rico (\$589 million) and the U.S. Virgin Islands for Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations, to help local educational agencies and non-public schools defray expenses related to the restart of operations in, the reopening of, and the re-enrollment of students in, elementary and secondary schools;
- \$440 million to 24 States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for Temporary Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students, which assists with the cost of educating K-12 students displaced by the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires;
- \$25 million to 20 States and Puerto Rico for Assistance for Homeless Children and Youth to support school districts serving homeless children and youth displaced by the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires;
- \$98 million for Emergency Assistance to Institutions of Higher Education awards to 68 postsecondary institutions in areas directly affected by the 2017 hurricanes and California wildfires; and
- \$7 million for Defraying Costs of Enrolling Displaced Students in Higher Education grants to help defray the unexpected expenses associated with enrolling displaced students from institutions of higher education directly affected by the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires.

Congress also provided \$35 million for Project SERV activities specifically focused on restoring the learning environment in areas affected by the 2017 disasters, along with authority to reimburse the regular Project SERV program for the grants made in the fall of 2017 (helping to maintain the reserve of funds that the Secretary uses to respond to violent or traumatic incidents such as the mass school shootings in 2018).

Similar to our work prior to enactment of the Bipartisan Budget Act, I think the Department performed well in administering these education recovery programs and awarding funds fairly and expeditiously. We provided multiple and often extended opportunities to eligible applicants

to submit and revise application data; offered comprehensive technical assistance, including dozens of individualized, State-specific calls; and maintained program-specific email inboxes to facilitate timely responses to questions from States, Territories, and local education officials on key issues such as allowable uses of funds. We believe these efforts, in general, have been well-received and appreciated by our State, Territory, and local partners.

At the same time, we recognize that, in far too many communities, recovery from the full effects of the 2017 disasters has been painfully slow and incomplete. That recognition makes this hearing a timely one, particularly as Congress considers new legislation responding to the 2018 disasters, including Hurricanes Michael and Florence, Typhoon Yutu, and the California wildfires, as well as the severe flooding in the Midwest earlier this year.

The Department's response to these new disasters thus far has largely followed the same script as for the 2017 disasters. We have reached out to affected States and communities, provided technical assistance, and used Project SERV to provide immediate assistance. Recent Project SERV awards include \$1.1 million to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands after Typhoon Yutu, \$2 million to the State of North Carolina and \$1.2 million to Bay County, Florida in 2018 for Hurricane Florence, and \$2 million to the State of California for the 2018 wildfires. This year, already tornadoes and flooding in Jefferson, Missouri may require our assistance to help restore the learning environment.

As a result of post-Hurricane Maria coordination discussions at the RSFLG with FEMA, ED is leading a new "School Communities Working Group" on "Planning for Effectively Supporting Schools and School Districts in Recovery" based on the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF). This Working Group will help other federal agencies better understand the needs of schools and how to interact with them; identify challenges, lessons learned, and successes; and submit recommendations to inform policy and RSF Operations.

We are taking concrete steps to improve our disaster response capabilities based on lessons learned over the past two years. Two key lessons are sobering, but important for managing

expectations as the number and severity of natural disasters appears to be increasing: full recovery from major disasters is extremely challenging work, and the Federal role depends heavily on State and local partners.

Natural disasters create extraordinary stresses on local governments and institutions, often taxing capacity nearly to the breaking point. Basic needs must be met first, followed by rebuilding activities that cover short-, medium-, and long-term time periods. Transitions in leadership and staffing, competing priorities for reconstruction, and even access to the basic manpower and materials required for rebuilding often slow the recovery process, at times seeming to bring it almost to a halt.

But this doesn't mean we can't do better in helping States, Territories, and communities overcome these challenges and restore the learning environment to the greatest extent possible, as soon as possible. Returning students to school, and teachers to the classroom, is essential not only for keeping students on track in their education, but also to restoring the daily rhythms of family, neighborhood, workplace, and community.

When Congress provides supplemental education-related disaster recovery funding to affected areas, it is vital that the Department respond by implementing the new authority and funding quickly and effectively. The provision of timely allocation of resources, high-quality support, and appropriate oversight of Federal funds is key to the recovery effort. We have learned that managing and coordinating all the Department's efforts takes dedicated staff and resources. In response, we have created a new Disaster Recovery Unit (DRU) housed within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. The new team has a director and three staff devoted full-time to managing the Department's disaster response efforts. A fourth staff member will be added in the near future. The DRU supports the development of permanent, in-house expertise to effectively and efficiently leverage other resources both within the Department and in partnership with other Federal agencies and technical assistance providers.

In addition, the DRU will help the Department partner more effectively with Congress to determine how to best support your communities in recovering as quickly as possible from

natural disasters, including the full restoration of the learning environment at all levels of our education system.

Thank you again for providing an opportunity for me to discuss this important issue. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you very much, Secretary Brogan.

Under committee rule 8(a), we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule. As chair, I have decided to go at the end, so I will yield to the next senior member on the majority side who will be followed by the ranking member. We will then alternate between the parties.

And first, of course, Dr. Brogan, apparently you guys know each other. It will be Dr. Shalala, Representative of Florida.

Ms. SHALALA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Assistant Secretary Brogan. We have been long-time friends and worked together in Florida over the years. The Secretary is lucky to have you.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you.

Ms. SHALALA. Let me, I am particularly concerned, Secretary Brogan, about the delays in the restart funds to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Puerto Rican educators continue to report that they have not received those funds. Can you give us a sense of why they have been delayed and what you are able to do to make sure that they get those funds?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes. Thank you, Congresswoman, and, indeed, good to see you as well. And by the way, they are lucky to have you too. It is a pleasure to be with you and all of the members.

And in answer to your question, of course, the process of moving the dollars made available by Congress to those who have been affected by natural disasters is very important, and it is also very important to expedite that effort.

The reality in 2017 when we received that appropriation, it was before me, but nevertheless, it was received in February. And ultimately, in the months of March, April, and May, a significant amount of money immediately went out the door in terms of available dollars. Those dollars were determined based on need at the time but also based on the programs and the activities to which they would be directed.

As you all know better than most, as far back as 2017, and even before that, certain categories of funding have been utilized in disaster recovery allocations after the total. That includes immediate aid to restart school operations. Congresswoman, that is restart, obviously. Temporary emergency impact aid for displaced students. Assistance for homeless children and youth is another. Project school emergency response to violence, those are those Serve grants that I mentioned a moment ago. And then in the world of higher education, defraying cost of the rolling displaced students program as well as emergency assistance to institutions of higher education.

So we rapidly tried to take the total amount of money and then begin the issue of dividing that based on the applications that we received which is another part of this process and then the distribution by program that I mentioned here. I hope that helps a little bit.

Ms. SHALALA. Yes. Do you know how much Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands each have drawn out of their restart funds to date?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, ma'am. I can tell you, first of all, what the appropriation was for each and then a little bit more about draw-

down. You mentioned V.I., Puerto Rico, and did you mention another one, Congresswoman?

Ms. SHALALA. No. Just Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Mr. BROGAN. Puerto Rico and V.I. Yes. For all of these, as I mentioned, the total impact provided by Congress was \$2.7 billion. As it relates to the drawdown, Puerto Rico out of that received for restart \$589,170,000 along with other categories of funding including \$70 million, \$277,000, and then through Project Serve, \$2 million.

Out of that, then, the drawdown schedule which I also have, and if I don't have it right in front of me, we will absolutely get you that. And by the way, the drawdowns are posted on the FEMA website because we work with groups like FEMA to keep a running tab on not only the total allocations but how much each has been drawing down during that time period, and we will get that to you.

But expeditious is the word that we try to look to when it comes to getting these dollars to the places that they need to go.

Ms. SHALALA. So you don't know exactly how much they have drawdown, Puerto Rico, for example, of the \$589 million?

Mr. BROGAN. I do know this. I don't have a dollar figure, but it is about 5 percent at this point.

Ms. SHALALA. That has been drawdown?

Mr. BROGAN. That has been drawdown. And again, that is a snapshot in time. Even as we sit here, the drawdown process which is tied to actual expenditures is changing even while we are sitting here today.

Ms. SHALALA. Mr. Secretary, I know you well enough to know that if you were in charge of education in Puerto Rico, you would be pretty upset if you had only drawdown 5 percent of the money. Is there anything you can do to expedite it for Puerto Rico? This is a year and a half, 2 years after the events.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Congresswoman. I am sorry. Yes. We work very hard with Puerto Rico, a tremendous amount of technical assistance and support, with the idea of being that the more they know, the better the opportunity they will have to more rapidly drawdown funds, work through the procurement process, and all of the things that can sometimes slow down the actual drawdown schedule of those funds.

So even almost going on 2 years out, the procurement process that they work with is very complicated, very cumbersome, and, indeed, is part of the contribution to the process of turning available funds into drawdown funds which means they not only procured what they need, but they sent the money on.

Chairman SABLAN. Mr. Secretary, respectfully, members have to run at 10, so I appreciate that—

Mr. BROGAN. Understood.

Chairman SABLAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Allen, for purpose of questioning the witness.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you. And again, Assistant Secretary, thank you for being with us.

In your testimony, you mentioned the creation of the disaster recovery unit. I have got a few questions about that. Now, your written statement said that the unit will have five full-time staff. What will their responsibilities be?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir, Ranking Member. Many Federal agencies already have in place full-time, dedicated staff on the issue of disaster and disaster recoveries. We ultimately believe that based on the number of natural disasters being identified and the amount of available dollars flowing to them through Congress that it was time that the Department of Education also install a full-time, dedicated unit to be the nucleus of activities on these issues.

There will be five people once we are fully staffed up, a person who will direct this operation and four others. They will help us to better coordinate with all of the other Federal agencies. They will help us to review our policies, processes, and procedures relative to how we handle natural disasters, and they will be an ongoing conduit to communication with people in the field based on both preparation as well as recovery efforts through technical assistance and support, and we are very excited about this.

Mr. ALLEN. And how will this unit interact with the recovery support function leadership group that you also discussed in your opening statement?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. That, of course, is the work we do with FEMA. We already have regular and ongoing meetings with FEMA and the other agencies that FEMA works with in terms of disaster preparedness and also disaster recovery. There are regular monthly meetings.

There are quarterly meetings of leadership. We will continue those, but by having this particular unit, it will give us an even better day-to-day conduit with not just FEMA but all of the other agencies in that case that work on disaster issues.

Mr. ALLEN. In your statement, also you indicated that the Department has learned a number of lessons over the last couple of years and is taking steps to improve its response capabilities. I know that, you know, in Georgia we recently had the Hurricane Michael and, of course, this was not the Department of Education, it is through USDA, but the system that was used was not particularly user-friendly, very complex, a lot of compliance, and obviously we want to make sure that every dollar is spent where it is supposed to be spent.

And presumably, one of these steps in the creation of the disaster recovery unit that we just discussed, what could you provide as far as more details about how the Department is otherwise improving its protocols to assist affected States and communities both before and after these natural disasters?

Mr. BROGAN. Ranking Member Allen and members, that question is a very important one as it relates to this group of individuals that I am speaking about in terms of the disaster recovery unit. The idea that everything that we have done is based on a historic track record of events and response, and yet, we are not satisfied that in every one of those cases, we are, as a Department, where we want to be to assure rapid response, rapid appropriation of funds made available by Congress, and ultimately the monitoring and review of how those funds are spent. It goes back a little bit to Congresswoman Shalala's question. And they will be an everyday, on the ground unit that will help support the effort of expediting in the future even better the work that we do.

One quick shoutout to Congress. The fact that Congress essentially is using in each of these recent appropriations I rattled off the list of programs before that they have remained consistent up to and including this most recent round of funding that you all approved just the other day is enormously helpful so that we don't have to go back and reinvent wheels along the way in that regard. We won't have to rework that effort.

So by working with Congress, by working with the other agencies, we are totally committed to continuing to review our process to assure that we cannot only expedite, but also as you mentioned, Ranking Member, be true to the fact that we are spending other people's money in that regard.

Mr. ALLEN. Exactly. Well, thank you so much. And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much to Mr. Allen.

At this time I now recognize Mr. Morelle from New York.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for holding this important hearing today to discuss the distressing effects of natural disasters on our communities and our schools, and thank you, Mr. Secretary for joining us today.

The United States must do everything in its power to address the existential threat of climate change including mitigating the devastating impacts of natural disasters on our communities. It is undeniable that stability of our climate is deteriorating. Each year we see spikes in extreme weather patterns, rising sea levels, and increasing severe natural disasters that displace families, destroy properties and ecosystems, and even end lives. And we are experiencing unprecedented streaks of tornadoes ripping through the midwest, deadly wildfires in California, catastrophic hurricanes in the southeast and in the Caribbean, and dangerous flooding threatening more than 20 States.

And the devastation that follows these natural disasters leaves communities struggling to rebuild and return to their daily lives, often never truly recovering.

I want to talk just for a moment about my district of Rochester and the devastating effects of flood waters. In 2017, the district was hit hard by record flooding that eroded lakeshore, ruined family homes, crippled lakeside businesses, disrupted educational institutions. Nearly 2 years later, many community members are still struggling to recover, but the impacts of climate change don't wait around for us.

In fact, just this week, Lake Ontario, where my district is, water levels hit a new record high. Yet again, the district is faced with the reality of rising flood levels exacerbated by strong winds and high waves which are expected to continue for several more weeks.

So recognizing the negative effects of natural disasters on our educational systems; canceled bus routes, school closures, displaced communities, destroyed infrastructure, and traumatized children. And the stability that schools provides for a student is upended by natural disasters and can have substantial negative effects and impacts if the road to recovery is blocked by insufficient funds or lack of coordination.

So planning for the future and improving the ability of our communities to withstand, recover, and adapt to weather-related

events is a requirement, and requires us the willingness to face the facts that climate change is real despite what people—and people can argue endlessly about the impact our species has had on it, but it is folly to ignore the fact that this is happening and do everything in our power to curb global warming and protect the planet.

I am particularly interested, Mr. Secretary, in preventive measures that we could take now to ready ourselves for the inevitable natural disasters which the natural disasters of tomorrow, and by tomorrow I mean literally, not necessarily figuratively.

So recognizing all this, I am curious as to whether the Department actually talks to the National Weather Service or other associated agencies around modeling that they may be doing and what the threats are to school communities around the country. Do you do that? Do you know if the Department does that on a regular basis?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. I don't know how regular a basis, but the Department does participate again in all of the committee work that is done by FEMA with all of the different agencies, and of course, those kinds of issues, as you probably imagine, are discussed with great frequency.

Mr. MORELLE. Well, I am happy to hear that. And is the Department engaged in data gathering relative to tracking property damage and whether there are increased levels of it around the country? Do you work with local districts or States on that, and also, the number of days missed due to natural disasters? Have you been tracking that data?

Mr. BROGAN. We are, Congressman, tracking data relative to issues like that through the SEAs, the States themselves who are, in part, responsible for tracking that data for The Every Student Succeeds Act. For example, chronic absenteeism, days out, et cetera, are things that are currently tracked.

Mr. MORELLE. And things attributable to these natural disasters that they are talking about, do they categorize that, do you know?

Mr. BROGAN. Some of that, we are, but again, we hope that by standing up this full-time operation, we can do an even better job in the future of beginning to take longitudinal looks at more and more information.

Mr. MORELLE. That will be great. And to the degree that you could share that with us so we could know that data would be great.

I am also interested. In my prior life in the State legislature, at one period I was a chair of the insurance committee, and we looked at ways to mitigate and resiliency prior to the impact of natural disasters, strengthening schools physically, emergency evacuation. Can you just describe in the remaining 20 seconds I have of my time, just give me an overview of what you are doing relative to communicating with States and districts about mitigation efforts?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. We do a tremendous amount of work through the various education associations, the meetings that they have to the State as well as the local level on preparation for, as most people who dealt with emergency situations realized, a great deal is determined in the preparation process as to how you are able to recover following the actual event, and we work very hard on those issues.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much.

At this time, I would like to recognize the ranking member of the full committee, the gentlelady from North Carolina, Dr. Foxx, for her 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Secretary Brogan, for being here.

It has been over a year since the first awards were made to areas impacted by the hurricanes and wildfires of 2017. I have a series of quick questions about these funds. Do you have data on how these funds are being spent?

Mr. BROGAN. Ranking Member, first of all, thank you for being here, and thank you for the question. But to all of the members, the answer to that is generally, yes. People are not required to put in a plan, per se, but everyone who received these dollars must put in a budget which is in some ways a skeletal structure of a plan, and those budgets are what we use to track expenditures and for what categories, et cetera.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you. Are States able to drawdown funds and allocate them to schools effectively and efficiently, and if not, are there particular road blocks that are preventing funds from being used effectively?

Mr. BROGAN. Ranking Member, as you might imagine, and I am sure you do, in the direct aftermath of these events, sometimes it is rather chaotic, and therefore, it takes a little bit of time for people to settle back in and be able to take a serious step away to look at exactly what their needs are and how that can be done.

That is part, by the way, of some of what some suggest is a delay in getting people their money. In order to fill out the application that they must, they have to be able to take a look at what they are doing and turn those needs into an application that we then use to build them their original allocation from what we received for Congress and then over time refine that with them for additional drawdowns.

Ms. FOXX. All right. I gathered from what you were saying, although I am sorry I missed your opening statement, that the Department is the setting up full-time people who are going to work with this year around. So could you tell us what technical assistance or other support is the Department providing to particularly hard-hit areas to help them with procurement and contracting? I think you alluded to that earlier.

Mr. BROGAN. Ranking Member, in some cases, because procurement is typically handled at the local level appropriately, procurement, as I mentioned, can be one of those delay points in the process based on how complicated some procurement processes are. It doesn't make that process bad. It is theirs, and they must work through that in order to do it. What we can do is continue to provide technical assistance, and we will not only continue that, we will expand that with this new team to try to make it clearer when and where necessary as to how the procurement process at the local level and the needs that we have to be compliant come together more expeditiously to be able to move that into dollars available.

Ms. FOXX. All right. Thank you again. The Department's past role in disaster relief has been fairly limited both in terms of the responsibilities your agency has taken on and the number and type of relief efforts the Department's been directly involved in. That seems to be changing, from your comments.

As you ramp up the Department's disaster response efforts, how are you structuring those efforts to allow you to respond to these wildly different kinds of disasters such as hurricanes, typhoons, wildfires, all sometimes happening at the same time?

Mr. BROGAN. Ranking Member, I have here a list that I have for reference, but it contains all of the locations that were affected in 2017 when the BBA was originally created, the Bipartisan Act. The 2018 and the 2019, there are dozens of locations identified in congressional legislation from that 2017 time until now. So to your good point, we have to be proactive and not wait to play catchup.

One of the reasons we have established the DR unit is to make sure that we are trying to keep pace full time with the growing number of recognized natural disasters and dealing with the appropriations we receive from Congress so they will do most good.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to note these are natural disasters. They are not things that we human beings can control, although I recognize there are things we should do our best to be able to respond to, but also it is my understanding FEMA and all of the Federal agencies are here simply to lend support to the local people. They are the ones on the ground year in, year out, and I think it is very important that we not hold unrealistic expectations to the Department of Education and other Federal departments for the responsibilities that are on the ground every day. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Brogan.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Ranking Member.

Chairman SABLAN. I have huge respect for the ranking member, but maybe she and I can on our own time debate climate change.

I would like to now recognize Mrs. Davis of California for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Assistant Secretary. Very nice to have you here. I appreciate it.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you Congresswoman.

Mrs. DAVIS. I know that you had mentioned that they were only able to drawdown about 5 percent of those funds. We are talking about Puerto Rico now, I believe.

Mr. BROGAN. Yes.

Mrs. DAVIS. And you have been at this for quite a while as well, and so I am wondering as you see this team taking a look at this and certainly the procurement process, and that has been mentioned on several occasions by both Ms. Shalala and Dr. Foxx, what do you think you are going to find that really could be done quite differently than it has in the past? What would you do?

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question. And coming from California, you know a little bit about these issues as well, but I would answer that question this way. I think we are going to find some things over time in the Department that we can and should do differently, and at the risk of sounding like I am

throwing it all back to the people at the State and local level, and believe me, I am not, we have to continue to work with people who have a huge amount of responsibility and also have to meet a huge number of obligations at the State and local level as well.

So it is trying to bring those two things together to create a more seamless system of communication, of expectation, of obligation so that there aren't, as I mentioned earlier when it comes to procurement, as many hurdles for people to cross as we might face today. And I think all of us, and I herald here the people at the State and local level, are working toward that, and hopefully we will get even better at it in the future.

Mrs. DAVIS. And I think part of it is trying to build that so-called resilience into the system so that people don't have to think about it.

Mr. BROGAN. Truly.

Mrs. DAVIS. I remember after Katrina, we talked about, you know, the worst time to exchange business cards is in the middle of a disaster. I mean, you have to build that in, and you have to know what one's counterpart is it at different levels, and so in that regard as well, I wonder.

You have talked about the 5 person team, but how about the so-called whole government approach as well? I mean, how many different agencies, beyond being on paper, are really engaged in problem solving in this area aggressively before disaster strikes? What are you seeing?

And I guess the role—and I am just responding to my colleagues. I agree. I mean, you know, obviously the Federal Government cannot possibly be doing the job of the State and local governments, but they should be aware of best practices where, in fact, there has been a seamless adjustment in communities that have been so devastated by these disasters.

Mr. BROGAN. I could not have said it better, Congresswoman. And I just had a conversation with folks at FEMA the other day, and they were expressing appreciation. We just did a presentation for not just FEMA but for, as I mentioned, the group that FEMA brings together on a regular basis in terms of some of the things that we in education have to deal with on our side of the issues, and they found it to be extraordinarily helpful.

We need to keep doing more of that as we continue to communicate with the people in the field so that we can find voids or find redundancies that also create inefficiency at the same time. So a lot of it, as corny as it might sound, really falls under the aegis of continued and even better communication by everyone as we move forward.

But I go back long enough, along with Congresswoman Shalala to remember Andrew in south Florida when I lived there. And I have to tell you. We are already back, way back, to some of those natural disasters and others in terms of lessons learned. We should not be repeating mistakes of the past.

Mrs. DAVIS. Yes. Of course, and I appreciate that. One of the real issues, of course, is where young people, even preschool age and earlier, can be housed during the horrible crisis that they are living through. And I am wondering about the role of the Federal Government as well when it comes to finding the facilities, the resources

in neighboring communities, and in some cases, as you know, far, far away from a disaster because they are not in areas that are intensely urban and that there are lots of choices for where people might go. So what is the role in that regard?

Mr. BROGAN. Indeed, and you mentioned it earlier, Congresswoman. Technically speaking, every Federal agency has the potential to be involved in disaster preparation and disaster recovery. As you might imagine as well being here in D.C., some of the agencies are more front and center on the issue just based on what they do.

So when we meet with FEMA, for example, we are also sitting around the table with HHS, obviously. We are meeting with DOJ based on the laws. We are meeting with Federal agencies like HUD that have a clear and distinct role. But technically speaking, the Federal Government is an open book when it comes to the potential of helping to support these—

Chairman SABLAN. Mr. Secretary—

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Chairman SABLAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mr. Taylor of Texas.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary, I appreciate you being here.

So in the Texas legislature, I was on the Education Committee, and one of the things that we dealt with was schedule, right. So some scheduling is done at the State level. Testing requirements. One of the things that we did is we actually moved from a 180-day, 7-hour day schedule to give me a number of minutes. I think it is 73,000 minutes. That actually gave school districts flexibility to move time around. So when you had a disaster, and this does happen in Texas, you know, people are able to actually shift their schedule around and actually lengthen school days and minimize the extension of the school year.

Are there Federal laws, you know, whether it is testing requirements that cause scheduling issues that you are finding are getting in your way?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. I can tell you this. We have taken, for example, the Every Student Succeeds Act and gone through that to make certain that it gives as well as can be expected with what kinds of flexibilities are included in that act that can be utilized, not just in general through waiver process, but as well in post natural disaster situations.

The timing of testing is a good example for that. It is possible under ESSA to move the time that the test was scheduled if that helps the situation, to delay it further in the cue to be able to get people settled in before the test is issued for one small example, and there are other possibilities for flexibility.

But we are actually learning a great deal from States like yours, Congressman Taylor, in terms of what additional flexibilities, still compliant with the ESSA law, but nevertheless, might give people other opportunities that they currently don't have for the future. And of course, if any of those require legislative authority, we would quickly turn to you all and ask for help and support as you are always ready to give.

Mr. TAYLOR. So what I think I heard is we have the flexibility we need, and if we think we need more, we will come back and ask.

Mr. BROGAN. We have all the flexibility we have. Whether it is enough, we will be determining over time with the help and assistance, especially of the people out there in the field.

Mr. TAYLOR. Sure.

Mr. BROGAN. They are the ones we listen to as to the impacts of all these things in terms of making any possible changes we might find necessary.

Mr. TAYLOR. Right. But what I think I heard you say is, you know, a tornado comes, takes out a school. They are not in school for a month. They need to push their tests back a month because the schedule is written as though nothing would ever happen, but things happen. So you are saying you can push it back?

Mr. BROGAN. Congressman—yes. The way that testing is approached is each one individual as far as waivers are concerned, and what is looked at is the time of the year of the event as it relates to the testing schedule, the size of the event, if you will, and other factors that determine what possibilities there might be to work around the natural disaster to do what still has to be done according to the Every Student Succeeds Act.

But greater flexibility in that regard is never a destination point because we are always looking for different ways to achieve that.

Mr. TAYLOR. And again, I just want to be sure. So as far as you can tell time now, you have the flexibility you need.

Mr. BROGAN. For now, yes, sir.

Mr. TAYLOR. Okay. All right. I think it answered that. Anything else you want to add?

Mr. BROGAN. No, sir, unless there are any other questions you have.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

At this time, I would like to recognize the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Scott, of Virginia.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, and Mr. Secretary, thank you for being with us today.

I want to follow through on the question just asked because a lot of the discussion has been on the budget and allocation of money and whatnot. But the effect on students—obviously, the students were out of school for some time. Are they back in school, and what has the school experience been like for them?

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is good to see you.

Generally speaking, students are back in school from previous disasters, but as you know, again, better than most, there are disasters unfolding as we are seated here today. And by virtue of the fact that those disasters are playing out, there are currently no doubt students who are not in school. The idea of preparation for these events and then recovery for these events always keeps in mind the importance of reopening schools as they have been closed but also keeping them open, if it is possible, in the preparatory way to make certain that young people have a place to go every single day.

Chronic absenteeism in general can be a problem, just students missing school, but anything that we can do to bring down the time that students miss school as it relates to the effects of a natural disaster is critical to us.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, can you say a word about the effect of these disasters on school achievement for the students?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. I will answer you this way, if I might. One of the things we do look at in the Every Student Succeeds Act, of course, is how people are faring in general based on the tempos that lie within that act. We look at not only general testing and results as they post up against State standards, but we also look at some of the subgroups that are laid out in ESSA to see how individual subgroups of students are faring at the same time. And we look at those with each State as a partner to determine just how students are looking generally.

Over time, what we would like to do is also be able to begin to look at how students might be, through appropriate research efforts, not just anecdotal, to see if natural disasters are having sizable impacts on student achievement as demonstrated through what is made responsible of them through the ESSA act.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, I guess my question is when you looked, what did you see?

Mr. BROGAN. Well, we aren't looking that way just yet. That is what I say. I think as we get better developed with how we respond to these things, and as we look toward the research community to assist us, among other things, those are some of things that we do want to begin to look at is not just the recovery effort itself but also, as you mentioned, the recovery and the impact that it has on teaching and learning.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, we need to get that information as soon as possible because it is possible that some of these students may have regressed and are not learning at the rate they should be, and we may need additional resources to correct that, but we won't know until we get—

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir.

Mr. SCOTT [continuing]. the data. Before coming to the Education Department, you were an official, as we heard, in Florida, a State that is particularly vulnerable to the effects of man-made climate change. What did Florida do to prepare for anticipated changes due to climate change like increased risk of hurricane and flooding as it relates to school operations?

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can say, rather proudly, that Florida is considered to be one of the leaders in the country in terms of preparation and recovery efforts when it comes to natural disasters. And by virtue of that fact, I was really proud to work with the men and women of Florida in terms of both efforts, how we better prepare as a State for those that are occurring and have occurred and how we deal with those that do occur.

As you might imagine, I saw my share of hurricanes, for example, during my 35 years in the State of Florida, and Florida essentially, if you ask them, they will probably answer the same way I do here about the Department of Education. We are constantly looking for ways, no matter how good we think we are, to be even better going forward in the future. And with the number—as I

mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, with the number of events and the number of States and territories impacted, our obligation is increasing as a Department along with the other Federal agencies in that regard.

Mr. SCOTT. I don't have time for you to answer this with the time I have left, but the National Climate Assessment released by the Trump administration warned that climate change is going to impact—have an increasing impact on losses to American infrastructure and property. They also advise that substantial and sustained global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could help reverse that.

If you could provide for the record what the Department is doing to deal with the effects of—reducing the effects of climate change, I would appreciate it. My time has expired, so I would like that for the record.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Now I would like to recognize Mr. Grothman for 5 minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. When you deal with things like hurricanes or the recent disaster bill, how much of that do you just get involved in, say, construction, that sort of thing?

Mr. BROGAN. Congressman, it is good to see you.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Good to see you, too.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you.

In answer to your question, when it comes to actual construction, we may be involved in small rapid turnaround for some recovery efforts, but largely those would be determined with the available funds you provide to us for things like some remodeling on a quick turnaround basis. Major construction or even major reconstruction efforts, of course, is left to FEMA.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. So are you involved a lot in putting children in different places, that sort of thing, so they don't miss class?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. We would be involved in things like, just for some examples, replacement of textbooks. That is very typical. Replacement of technology that is lost as a result of natural disasters.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. I guess primarily we talk about naturally disasters here, we are talking about hurricanes, right, usually?

Mr. BROGAN. Those are the big ones, not alone, but those are the big ones.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right. Could you describe the difference between the Federal Government would be involved in a hurricane, say, in this decade and, say, in the 1960's or 1970's when we had some big hurricanes?

Mr. BROGAN. The difference between now and then in terms of the Federal response?

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right. The degree to which the Department—I guess the Department of Education wasn't even around until the late 1970's.

Mr. BROGAN. I can tell you, Congressman, if I can, just anecdotally, that just after 35 years in Florida in a variety of different public service capacities, we are getting better and better as a Nation in helping to deal with the preparation for, very important, and the aftermath of natural disasters, whether they are hur-

ricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, volcanoes. And not only in part because we have to, but also because people are communicating better.

And I think Congress is another good example. Your responses to these things have no doubt changed very much over a long period of years for the better as well.

Mr. GROTHMAN. If we are always willing to collectively give in more money, I guess. I have noticed that in the few years that I have been here.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Could you describe ways that we are doing things differently today? I don't know how familiar you are with how we handled things in the 1990's or the 1980's or such. But could you give me examples of things that have changed?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes. Thank you, Congressman.

I think we are doing a better job collectively of preparation. I think in the early days, perhaps, whatever that means, we spent most of our time and energy on recovery. That is still necessary.

But I think we as a Nation are doing much more and a much better job of dealing with how we deal with a natural disaster when one befalls us as opposed to just how we will recover once we have to deal with one, and I think that has made a major difference.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Can you give me examples, some examples?

Mr. BROGAN. Sure. I go back to the group that FEMA has where we talk at the Federal level, all the agencies, on a very regular basis. And a part of those conversations is dedicated to preparation, training of people at the local level, providing onsite review of schools, for example, that can identify ways that individual school can better prepare itself in the event of a natural disaster.

Those kinds of things are not only discussed regularly, but technical assistance, support, whole websites are set up through the Federal agencies to be able to make available to people specific recommendations as to how to better prepare for the future.

Mr. GROTHMAN. So even beforehand, local school districts in Florida are attending a seminar or something or other saying, if we have a hurricane this year, this is what we are going to do?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay.

I'll yield the remainder of my time.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Congressman.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

At this time, I would like to recognize Mrs. Hayes of Connecticut for her 5 minutes.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Assistant Secretary Brogan, for being here.

I also want to talk about what happens after, as part of the recovery efforts. I have some very personal experience as far as dealing with students after a disaster in my first years of teaching. It was right after Katrina. And we welcomed students from the State of Louisiana into our school system not really knowing where they were in the academic spectrum, not knowing how long they would be there, and saw their families dealing with trauma.

More recently, after Hurricane Maria, my State welcomed over 2,000 students. My district, in the district that I now represent, two of the cities, Waterbury and New Britain, welcomed more students than any other community. This increased our bilingual education population. Where would we house these students? How do we hire new teachers to accommodate these new students? All of these things were questions that we had to ask.

And I guess what I am thinking about is, I saw the phenomenon that flourished after Hurricane Katrina, and that was charter schools, where regulations were loosened and, in an effort to reopen all these schools, charters that were run by dozens of different independent operators were opened.

I recently ran into a parent who, literally, from one of these communities, I was at an education summit, and she talked about how before Katrina her kids went to the same school. After, the school could no longer accommodate her son with special needs, and a year later it closed, another school moved in, and there were some serious problems.

So I am concerned that the pattern that we saw in Katrina will now be duplicated. And my concern comes partly from a statement that you made that, and I quote, you stated that Puerto Rico would become a beacon of school choice in the wake of Hurricane Maria and the Department would work side by side with the Puerto Rico Department of Education to achieve that goal.

It's not a beacon of light. I saw teachers struggled to get recertified, couldn't get their proper credentials once their community was affected by a disaster, just all kinds of things. And I sit here today in Congress, but I have spent most of my time on the ground, so I have been on the receiving end of this, you know.

So my question is, what exactly has been the role of the Department in this new reform? Or has the Department in any way sought to promulgate school choice further in Puerto Rico post-Maria?

Mr. BROGAN. In terms of recovery efforts—

Mrs. HAYES. Yes.

Mr. BROGAN. Congresswoman?

Mr. BROGAN. The technical assistance and support we provide on the issue of school choice is ongoing irregardless. It was there before the storms and continues, separating the issue of recovery from the issue of school choice. But there have been no attempts to ramp up those efforts or alter those efforts as a tool to deal with the recovery efforts, if that answers your question.

Mrs. HAYES. So there is no attempt to promote it further in Puerto Rico or replace the public system with a charter-specific system?

Mr. BROGAN. No more or less than before the natural disaster events.

As you know, the infrastructure in Puerto Rico before the storms was facing great difficulty. That includes loss of students before the storms. That includes facilities, classrooms, school buildings that needed refurbishment or even replacement before the storms.

The storms, of course, grotesquely exacerbated the problems that in many cases Puerto Rico was already facing.

Mrs. HAYES. Just to leave you with something. As you continue to talk about how you prepare for storms, I can tell you that one

of the main challenges that I saw was access to student records. Even when teachers went to get certified in another State, in Puerto Rico what I saw, people who had gone to the University of Puerto Rico could not access any of their academic data, so therefore they could not pursue certification in another State. That was a huge problem outside of what we see on the ground.

So part of the gap in transitioning students was not having access to the information that we needed to either properly place them. So, literally, even though they were attending schools or on-site, they were not receiving the academic education that they needed because we weren't sure what to do with them. So they were just, in essence, being housed, sometimes for several weeks, while we were trying to close the gap on that lag.

So, I mean, you can't really prepare for that. But just as you are thinking through next steps, that is something that really we need to have a more proactive plan to address.

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Congresswoman. It is good to see you, by the way.

Chairman SABLAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I think we actually have time for Mr. Thompson of Pennsylvania, GT, 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON. Chairman, thank you so much.

Chancellor, great to see you. Congratulations just on your continued service to our kids, everything you have done in Pennsylvania and Florida and now nationwide. You're greatly appreciated.

My first question really has to do with—and I appreciate you being here today to talk about the issue.

I know that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act broadly requires Project SERV funds to be awarded to entities where the learning environment has been disrupted, but could you explain in more detail the criteria or criterion that the Department uses to determine where Project SERV funds are awarded and how much an entity receives?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir. And this can become very bureaucratic, so I won't try go there, but I will try very hard to answer your question. It is good to see you, too, again, Congressman.

Project SERV comes from the Congress. It was made available some years ago for what is considered to be availability of flexibility and rapid response in the aftermath of acts of trauma, violence, or as become a part of this natural disaster.

It requires an application from the people at the local level, and then, based on that application, there are three ways to receive money. One is that you can apply for a grant for 6 months, which could be up to \$50,000. One is for a longer, larger grant of up to 18 months for immediate need based on a restoration to an appropriate learning environment that can be up to \$250,000 for that 18-month period.

But as the natural disasters have continued to grow, and some up on the dais are aware of this, larger awards are being made by the Secretary, in this case for 2017 and some for 2018, for immediate response that go as high as \$1 million to \$2 million based on the available Project SERV funds that we have.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you for that.

And I know, I mean, we have seen such catastrophic disasters—hurricanes, flooding, wildfires out in the western parts of the State. So the question I have is actually kind of on a smaller scale. Where a lot of the country is getting drier, we, Pennsylvania, is getting wetter. And where we are not really having flooding as much, the groundwater is so full that we have had some schools that have been closed because of mold. And it is not a fault of the school districts and the maintenance crew. They are doing great stuff. It is just a combination of all that water soaking into the water table.

And so we have had schools close from time to time, mostly, obviously, short-term, I think. I am not aware of anyone that has been closed long-term. But is that the kind of thing that perhaps a school district could, and therefore those kids who are being relocated, perhaps when it lasts longer than other times, is that the kind of thing that would maybe under consideration for assistance for a temporary relocation for education purposes?

Mr. BROGAN. It could be. As a matter of fact, we know that when it comes to some of our more remote locations—territories, Commonwealths, et cetera—people have used some of those Project SERV dollars to lease alternative space when their entire facility was rendered useless as a result of a typhoon, for example, and that Project SERV money had that kind of flexibility attached to it.

It is always subject to the available sum of money we have for Project SERV. And sometimes, as we have done recently to get through the rest of this fiscal year, we can cap the awards for everybody, just to make sure that if we get deeper into the Fiscal Year and something happens, we have available funds. But it is a very flexible pot of money that Congress has provided us.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes. And I certainly recognize the catastrophic issues that we have had, entire schools being lost and the impact.

Thank you for that clarification. It is good to see you again.

I yield back.

Mr. BROGAN. Good to see you again, sir.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson.

Votes have been called now, but Mr. Allen has agreed to come back after for the second panel.

But, Mr. Brogan, I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Secretary, do you agree with the findings of the Trump administration's National Climate Assessment that man-made climate change is causing grave damage to our country and must be reversed?

Mr. BROGAN. Mr. Chairman, as you might expect, I and others regularly get questions about climate change, especially doing the kinds of jobs that we do. And my answer, and believe me, it is not meant to be glib, it's honest. I think, like most, recognize the changes that are taking place in climate.

But I admit, I have been in education for 40 years, but I am not a scientist, and the direct result of all of that, I couldn't tell you about. We rely on a lot of other people in that regard.

But I do know this, and I tell my 14-year-old son this regularly, we, each of us, has to be a responsible steward of our little slice of the planet on which we live.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes, sir. We only have one, and we all have to share it. But in your position, I need to ask, how is the Department of Education contributing to efforts to combat climate change?

Mr. BROGAN. Well, as you might imagine, we work on the education front. So largely the vast majority of work that we do, we do with schools, with teachers, and with children.

And I can then on the flip side tell you that all over the country our educational community continues to talk about climate, about being good stewards, as it relates to our students, of the world environment and making sure that they each, all 50 million of them, are responsible stewards in their own way. And that effort, I think it is safe to say, goes on essentially every day in America's schools, public and private.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you. Mr. Brogan. I have other questions.

Mr. Secretary, again, in the disaster aid relief package that passed 2 days ago, on Monday, \$165 million is included to go to the Department of Education to distribute for school recovery along with wide latitude to the Secretary to do so.

What I want to know is, how does the Department plan to use that funding in the next 90 days before the new school year starts? Could you tell us how the Department will provide timely and effective assistance to all affected areas, please?

Mr. BROGAN. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

We will, of course, continue to respond to immediate needs, as we have in the past—you had mentioned Project SERV before—when-ever and wherever necessary and possible.

But even beyond that, the legislation that passed also includes a responsibility that we develop within the Department, within the next 30 days following the signing of that legislation, a spending plan for the dollars that have been provided by Congress and that Congress will have availability of that spending plan after that 30-day period of time.

And then, as always, we are responsible for providing reports on a regular basis as to how dollars are flowing and being drawndown.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you.

You also stated in your testimony that the Department created a Disaster Recovery Unit, DRU, manned by a director and three support staff, housed within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, devoted full time to managing the Department's disaster response efforts and help the Department partner more effectively with Congress.

What I would like to know is, prior to the creation of DRU, how many full-time employees were dedicated to assisting schools with disaster response efforts and partnering with Congress? And what has DRU done to date to assist schools in California, the Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands?

Mr. BROGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In answer to the question, let me parse it out a little bit by way of response.

In the Department no one has been devoted thus far 100 percent to the issue of natural disasters. We have many people who have fulfilled that role in part across not only the Office of Elementary

and Secondary, but across the Department. This will be our first-time effort into organizing around a group of people who will have that responsibility 24/7.

In that regard, however, we recently did a check to see how many people hours have been invested recently in the natural disaster work based on all of the people involved, through technical assistance and support preparation, et cetera. I think we stopped counting at 20,000 people hours.

So everybody in our Department in some way, shape, or form has the potential to be involved in this process, and with the development of a full-time unit, they can help us better coordinate even those activities.

Chairman SABLAN. Mr. Secretary, my time is up. Thank you very much. And thank you for joining us today, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. BROGAN. My pleasure.

Chairman SABLAN. Good to see you.

Mr. BROGAN. My pleasure, sir.

Chairman SABLAN. We are going to take a recess now so members can run and cast, I think there are four votes—oh, one. One. Okay. I think we will have quorum once they are done with voting, so we will have time for the second panel. Be patient.

[Recess.]

Chairman SABLAN. Just before we recessed, I would like to state something for the record. I want to remind my colleagues that, pursuant to committee practice, materials for submission for the hearing record must be submitted to the committee clerk within 14 days following the last day of the hearing, preferably in Microsoft Word format.

The material submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing. And only a member of a committee or an invited witness may submit test materials for inclusion in the hearing record.

Documents are limited to 50 pages each. Documents longer than 50 pages will be incorporated into the record via an internet link you must provide to the committee clerk within the required timeframe. But please recognize that years from now that link may no longer work.

The ranking member, Mr. Allen, is here joining us. And I would now begin by introducing our witnesses for the second panel.

Mr. Glenn Muña, the Commissioner of Education for the Northern Mariana Islands, is a former elementary school principal—I remember I used to visit his school—and was appointed Associated Education Commissioner in 2012, an interim Commissioner for Education in 2017, before becoming the Commissioner of Education in 2018. Mr. Muña holds a B.A. in Health Education from Western Oregon University and a Master's of Art and teaching from Framingham State College.

Ms. Rosa Soto-Thomas is a native of St. Croix and has been the president of the St. Croix Federation of Teachers since 2012. She is the first woman to be elected president of Local 1826.

Ms. Soto-Thomas began her career as a teacher and served as a school psychologist for 23 years. She is an advocate for community engagement and has led the union to partner with numerous agencies in the community.

Ms. Soto-Thomas holds a B.A. degree in Elementary Education from the University of the Virgin Islands and a Master of Arts degree in School Psychology from the University of Connecticut at Storrs.

Mr. Winn, Mr. John Winn, was an educator for 45 years. He began his career as an elementary and middle school teacher in 1970. After serving as a teacher, educator, and grants manager for rural school districts, he joined the Florida Department of Education in 1984. He served in several positions before being appointed to Commissioner of Education in August 2004. During his tenure as commissioner, student achievement in Florida reached an all-time high.

In 2007 he retired as Commissioner of Education and joined the National Math and Science Initiative. There, he directed the national replication of proven programs to prepare STEM teachers and dramatically expand student enrollment and success in advanced mathematics and science courses, especially among disadvantaged students.

My commissioner is here. I am just saying this so maybe he could consider inviting you to the Northern Marianas as well.

Finally, Dr. Steven Herrington—welcome—was elected Sonoma County superintendent of schools in 2010 and has over 40 years of service in the field of education. He is a native Californian who began his career as a history teacher.

He served as superintendent for three Northern California school districts. In these positions he gained experience in rural, suburban, and urban settings. He has led educational services for students from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Again, I would like to give instructions for the witnesses. I will give the abbreviated version of instruction to the witnesses. As a reminder, you are asked to limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written statement.

It is illegal to knowingly and willfully falsify any statement, representation, writing, document, or material fact presented to Congress or otherwise conceal or cover up a material fact.

Before you begin your testimony, please remember to press the button on the microphone in front of you so that it will turn on and the members can hear you. The light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes the light will turn yellow to signal that you have 1 more minute. When the light turns red, we ask that you please wrap up.

We will let the entire panel make their presentations before we move to member questions. When answering a question, please remember to once again turn your microphone on.

I will first recognize Commissioner Muña for his 5 minutes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MR. GLENN MUÑA, COMMISSIONER, CNMI
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, SAIPAN, MP**

Mr. MUÑA. Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen, and members of the committee, hafa adai, tirow, and thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences from the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas as we work together to recover after the devastation of a Super typhoon 7 months ago.

Super Typhoon Yutu hit the CNMI on October 24, 2018, with sustained winds in excess of 200 miles per hour. The 20-mile-wide eye of Yutu passed over the islands of Tinian and Saipan. It used to be in the last 3 years we were hit by a super typhoon

Climate change is happening and it matters that we act immediately. The Federal Government should act to slow and reverse our human impact on our environment. If we don't, we first risk losing beautiful islands like ours.

The frequency of super typhoon and their increased size and sustained wind forces require a change in how we build our schools, how we build our homes, our airports, and our seaports. They must be built sustainably and in an economically responsible manner so that we do not have to continue to start anew each time a new disaster occurs.

Out of 20 public schools in the CNMI, over half were damaged by the typhoon. We have five schools that require major repairs, such as rewiring, reroofing, replacement of doors, windows, air-conditioner repairs and replacement, loss of computers, textbooks, student chairs, and tables.

Our largest middle school, Hopwood, is conducting classes in 42 tents because it is completely destroyed. The tents, which resemble a military camp, are a temporary solution but could totally be blown away by the next typhoon.

What we need are reinforced concrete schools that can withstand sustained super typhoon winds in excess of 200 miles per hour. The estimated cost to build a new Hopwood is roughly about \$40 million.

Another school, Da'Ok Academy, is housed temporarily in a tin building while we await reconstruction or relocation of those students.

Seven months after the storm, we still have five schools operating in double sessions. Double session means students attend school for the first half of the day and the other set of students may use the same building for the second half of the day. This is especially difficult for working families who need to figure out who will watch their children and for the other half of the day.

Double sessions also means double driving for our school bus drivers, which results in more school bus downtime for repairs and students arriving late to school and late to return to their homes.

The CNMI Public School System spent \$1.8 million on clearing debris from 18 schools and 8 Head Start centers on Tinian and Saipan and in caring for families using schools as shelters before, during, and after the typhoon.

We estimate about \$24 million to be received from FEMA to restore broken classroom buildings at Hopwood Middle School to their previous condition, which means tin roof buildings. Let's remember that we lost tin roofs on most of the school buildings during Super Typhoon Yutu. Tin roof buildings are not sustainable in super typhoon conditions.

To date, we have received reimbursement from FEMA of just over \$750,000.

In addition, we have estimated about \$60 million in repairs to be made at our schools, but are still waiting final approval of project

worksheets from FEMA. We have our estimates. These repairs cannot be made until FEMA approves the project worksheets.

Tourism is our Commonwealth's main industry, with over 550,000 visitors each year. Our airports were closed to commercial traffic for over a month after the typhoon and tourist arrivals are off by 40 percent since the beginning of this calendar, according to Marianas Visitor Authority, which tracks arrivals each month and hotel room occupancy and room rates. This drop in tourism has a big impact on the amount of funds currently available to support public education in the CNMI this fiscal year and next fiscal year.

As a result of decreased local revenues, we are now taking about 15 percent budget cut this year as well as next fiscal year. This on top of the fact that we still do not have the Federal funds to make necessary school infrastructure repairs.

We urgently need disaster relief funds from FEMA and the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief Fund so that we can make school repairs in the summer when school is out of session beginning this June through August, with a reopening of September 3.

We need a faster response from our FEMA Federal partners, FEMA and CDBG-DR. We were able to secure a Project SERV grant of \$1.1 million a month after the storm from the U.S. Department of Education.

The Project SERV grant pays for grief counselors for our students and teachers who have suffered losses as a result of Super Typhoon Yutu, overtime for our bus drivers who are working double sessions, substitute teachers to replace teachers who left the island after the devastation of Yutu, and rental space for our school, Da'Ok Academy.

Project SERV has been a big and timely help, yet 7 months have come and gone and we are still waiting for our FEMA cost estimates and approved project worksheets for school repairs.

[The statement of Mr. Muña follows:]

Congressional Testimony by Glenn Muña
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and Labor
June 5, 2019

Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our experience in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as we work together to recover after the devastation of a super typhoon seven months ago.

Super Typhoon Yutu hit the CNMI on October 24th, 2018, with sustained winds in excess of 200 miles per hour. The 20 mile-wide eye of Yutu passed over both the islands of Tinian and Saipan. It used to be that we were visited by a super typhoon once every twenty years. We have been hit by two in the last three years. Climate change is happening and it matters. The federal government should act to slow and reverse our human impact on our environment. If we don't, we risk first losing beautiful islands like ours. The frequency of super typhoons and their increased size and sustained wind forces require a change in how we build our schools, how we build our homes, our airports and our seaports. They must be built sustainably, and in an economically responsible manner so that we do not have to continue to start anew each time a new disaster occurs.

Out of twenty public schools in the CNMI, over half were damaged by the typhoon. We have five schools that require major classroom repair: rewiring, re-roofing, replacement doors and windows, air conditioner repair and replacement, loss of computers, textbooks, student chairs, and tables. Our largest Middle School, Hopwood, is conducting classes in 42 tents because it was completely destroyed. It will require rebuilding. We must rebuild it to safely and properly house 918 students. The tents, which resemble a military camp, are a temporary solution but could be totally blown away by the next typhoon. What we need are reinforced concrete schools that can withstand sustained super typhoon winds that exceed 200 miles per hour. The estimated cost to build a new Hopwood is \$40 million. Another school, Da'Ok Academy, is housed temporarily in a tin building while we await reconstruction or relocation of those students.

Seven months after the storm, we still have five schools operating on double sessions (WSR Elementary, Oleai Elementary, San Vicente Elementary, FMS Middle School, and Koblerville Elementary). Double sessions mean students attend school for half the day so that another set of students may use the same building for the other half of the day. This is especially difficult for working families who need to figure out who will watch the children for the other half of the day? Double sessions also mean double driving for our school bus drivers, which results in more school bus down time for repairs and students arriving late to school and late to return to their homes.

The CNMI Public School System spent \$1.8 million on clearing debris from our eighteen schools and eight Head Start centers on Tinian and Saipan, and in caring for families using our schools as typhoon shelters before, during, and for three weeks after the typhoon. We estimate on receiving about \$24 million from FEMA to restore the broken classroom buildings at Hopwood Middle School to their previous condition - which means tin roofed buildings. Let's remember that we lost the tin roofs of most of our school buildings during Super Typhoon Yutu. Tin-roofed buildings are not sustainable in super typhoon conditions. To date we have received a reimbursement from FEMA of just over \$750,000 and are still owed \$1,000,000. In addition, we have over \$60 million in repairs to be made to our schools, but are still waiting for final approval of project worksheets from FEMA. We have our estimate. We need FEMA to respond. These repairs cannot be made until FEMA approves the project worksheets.

Tourism is our Commonwealth's main industry with over 550,000 visitors each year. Our airports were closed to commercial traffic for over a month after the typhoon and tourist arrivals are off by 40% since the beginning of this calendar year according to Marianas Visitors Authority which tracks arrivals each month and hotel room occupancy and room rates. This drop in tourism has a big impact on the amount of funds currently available to support public education in the CNMI this fiscal year and next fiscal year. As a result of decreased local revenues, we are taking a 15% budget cut this year and the same for next fiscal year. This is on top of the fact that we still do not have the federal funds to make necessary school infrastructure repairs. We urgently need disaster relief funds from FEMA and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-DR) funds so that we can make school repairs in the summer when school is out of session beginning this June through August with school reopening on September 3, 2019.

We need a faster response from our federal partners - FEMA and CDBG-DR. We were able to secure a Project SERV grant of \$1.1 million within a month of the storm from the United States Department of Education. The Project SERV grant pays for grief counselors for our students and teachers who have suffered losses as a result of Super Typhoon Yutu, overtime for our bus drivers working double sessions, substitute teachers to replace teachers who left after the devastation of Yutu, and rental space for one school, Da'Ok Academy. Project SERV has been a big and timely help. Yet seven months have come and gone and we are still waiting for FEMA cost estimates and approved project worksheets for school repairs. Also, CDBG-DR doesn't even have a time table for when we can expect support. While we have students attending class in tents, or in schools on half day sessions, all while dealing with trauma, this slow response is unacceptable. The critical importance of a prompt response cannot be understated. It can be done.

We recommend the federal government provide greater flexibility to make temporary repairs like fixing roofs so that it doesn't rain into classrooms that have lost their roofs. The current FEMA rule is if we make temporary repairs to fix a broken roof, then we lose out on reimbursement funds for hazard mitigation, which are upgrade funds to harden our schools and thus make our schools more typhoon-resistant.

The federal assistance we have received to help us recover from this natural disaster is much appreciated. What we would like to see from some federal agencies is a more timely response.

Thank you.

Chairman SABLAN. Commissioner, thank you. Your full testimony will be entered into the record. Thank you very much.

Mr. MUÑA. Thank you.

Chairman SABLAN. I now recognize Ms. Soto-Thomas for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MS. ROSA SOTO-THOMAS, PRESIDENT, ST. CROIX FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AFT LOCAL 1826, KINGSHILL, ST. CROIX, V.I.

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Sablan and other members of this subcommittee.

My name is Rosa Soto-Thomas. I am the president of the St. Croix Federation of Teachers. I represent teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff, and we serve approximately 10,000 students attending two high schools, three junior high schools, and eight elementary schools.

On September 19, 2017, Hurricane Maria ravaged the island of St. Croix, causing significant damage to our infrastructure. Many citizens lost or suffered severe damage to their homes and other personal property.

The Virgin Islands Public School System sustained tremendous damages and is still in a State of disrepair. Arthur Richards Junior High School was entirely condemned by FEMA and is slated for a complete rebuild. Julius Sprauve on St. Thomas, a K through 8 school, is scheduled for rebuild as well.

Many schools are being housed in temporary facilities. Lew Muckle and Pearl B. Larsen elementary schools have gotten some modular structures to replace condemned spaces and classrooms. Addilita Cancryn Junior High School in St. Thomas is currently housed on a football field of Charlotte Amalie High School, which has negatively impacted the school's recreation and athletic program. And modular facilities were recently constructed at the Arthur A. Richards Junior High School.

Unfortunately, Alexander Henderson Elementary School had to be abruptly closed in April of 2019 and is now housed within the Arthur Richards site. Consequently, two schools are now occupying this complete modular site. This school is obviously overcrowded and has scaled back programs due to lack of sufficient classroom space.

The western wing of the Eulalie Rivera Elementary School was totally destroyed and has since been condemned. Modular structures have been erected to replace the demolished classrooms. The condemned structure of the western-most wing on the site remains untouched and is surrounded by chain-link fencing.

Recently, a wall at Lew Muckle Elementary School that housed 6 second and third grade classrooms collapsed, causing school officials to reassign teachers and students to classrooms that were out of commission. To date, nothing has been repaired in this area. Seemingly, no plans to do so exist.

Both of our island high schools, St. Croix Central High School and St. Croix Educational Complex, are in desperate need of repair. The two schools are currently preparing for an accreditation visit from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. If

permanent repairs are not executed, the only two high schools on the island of St. Croix will likely lose accreditation.

The air-conditioning units in our Career and Technical Education Center has been down for quite some time. The building leaks and has mold. We are concerned that students and school employees continue to get sick.

We are essentially at a standstill regarding any pending permanent repairs by FEMA. Repeated damage assessments of our schools and activity centers and facilities have been executed by many government officials and agencies, and yet no concrete plan has been employed to begin to permanently fix our hurricane-ravaged schools and facilities.

More than 20 months after the hurricanes, many of our educators continue to suffer from respiratory ailments related to mold and poor air quality in our schools and activity centers. Additionally, there is no drinking water in any of our public schools and the public water system dispenses rusty and discolored water daily.

To date, our members and students continue to experience a slew of medical symptoms, including post-traumatic stress disorder. This was discovered during a recent visit by volunteer nurses, AFT nurses, who came to the Virgin Islands to perform hearing and vision screening. Many classrooms throughout all of our schools do not have desk and chairs for children or teachers or book cubicles or storage closets.

At this phase, the Virgin Islands Department of Education has not released its summer maintenance plan to shore up our schools. The question we need answered: Where is the Virgin Islands Department of Education and FEMA with the permanent repair plans? And where is the U.S. Department of Education on its oversight? No definitive plans to complete permanent repairs have been unveiled to the union or community.

[The statement of Ms. Soto-Thomas follows:]

Testimony of Rosa Soto-Thomas

Good afternoon Mr. Sablan and other members of this subcommittee. My name is Rosa Soto-Thomas, and I am president of the St. Croix Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1826, in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I represent teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff. We serve approximately 10,000 students in the St. Croix School District. Our public school system is comprised of two high schools, three junior high schools and eight elementary schools.

On Sept. 19, 2017, Hurricane Maria ravaged the island of St. Croix causing significant damage to our infrastructure. Many citizens lost or suffered severe damages to their homes and other personal property.

The Virgin Islands Public School System sustained tremendous damages and is still in a state of disrepair. Arthur A. Richards, one of three junior high schools on the island, was entirely condemned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and is slated for a complete rebuild in St. Croix. Julius E. Sprauve K-8 School on St. John is scheduled for rebuild as well.

Many schools are being housed in temporary facilities—which presents its own set of challenges. Lew Muckle and Pearl B. Larsen Schools have gotten some modular structures to replace condemned spaces and classrooms. Addilita Cancryn Jr. High School on St. Thomas is currently housed on a football field of Charlotte Amalie High School, which has negatively impacted the school's recreation and athletic programs.

And modular facilities were recently constructed at the Arthur Richards Jr. High School. Unfortunately, Alexander Henderson Elementary School had to be abruptly closed in April 2019, and is now housed within the

Arthur Richards site. Consequently, two schools are currently occupying this completely modular site. Thus this school is obviously over crowded over and has scaled back programs due to lack of sufficient classroom space. One major problem with the modular is there are no awnings or shelter space to traverse during inclement weather.

The western wing of the Eulalie Rivera Elementary School in Grove Place was totally destroyed and has since been condemned along with the administrative building. Modular structures have been erected to replace the demolished classrooms. The condemned structure of the most westerly wing on site remains untouched surrounded by chain - linked fencing.

Recently, a wall at Lew Muckle Elementary School that housed six second and third grade classrooms partially collapsed causing school officials to reassign teachers and students to classrooms which were out of commission. Thank God that none of our students or teachers were injured. To date, nothing has been repaired and seemingly no plans to do so exist.

Both of our island's high schools, St. Croix Central High School and the St. Croix Educational Complex High School are in dire straits. Very little has happened to repair these schools. These school are currently preparing for an accreditation visit by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. If permanent repairs are not executed, both high schools on the island of St. Croix will likely lose accreditation.

The air conditioning unit in our Career and Technical Education Center has been down for quite some time. The building leaks and has mold. We are concerned that students and school employees continue to get

sick. Many instructors are slated to retire from our only vocational facility on the island of St. Croix.

We are essentially at a stand-still regarding any pending permanent repairs by FEMA. Repeated damage assessment of our schools and facilities have been executed by many government official and agencies and yet no concrete plans have been employed to begin to permanently fix our hurricane ravaged schools and facilities. More than a year and eight months after the hurricanes, many of our educators continue to suffer from respiratory ailments related to mold and poor air-quality in our schools and activity centers.

Additionally, there is no drinking water in any of our public schools. And the public water system dispenses rusted and discolored water daily. We are currently experiencing increased warm temperatures and our students and members need to be hydrated to focus on their teaching and learning.

At this phase, the Virgin Islands Department of Education has not released its summer maintenance plan to shore-up our schools. The question begs, where is the Virgin Islands Department of Education and FEMA with the permanent repair plans?

At this juncture, AFT members are most concerned about permanent repairs of our schools being done. No definitive plans to complete permanent repairs have been unveiled to the union or community.

Access to technology in the Virgin Islands is very limited. Most school programs are either impacted daily by intermittent service or no services at all. Both our educators and students rely heavily on the internet to complete their work.

To date, our members continue to experience a slew of medical symptoms including PTSD. This was discovered by the recent visit of volunteer AFT nurses to the Virgin Islands performing hearing and vision screening.

In many instance there is lack of security. As recent as last week, two schools were vandalized forcing school closure for the day. Many classrooms throughout all schools do not have desks or chairs for children or teachers, or book cubicles or storage closets.

How can Congress help us? We need a disaster recovery plan that enlists the assistance of experts as well as our entire community. We need definitive plans for the reconstruction of our schools. We need better communication and updates of how were moving alone. We need less red tape with accountability of those responsible for overseeing the new development and rebuilding of the Virgin Islands.

Thank you for having me here to represent the citizens of St. Croix. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman SABLAN. Ms. Soto-Thomas, thank you. Your testimony will be submitted into the record.

I now recognize Mr. Winn for 5 minutes, please.

**STATEMENT OF MR. JOHN L. WINN, M.A., FORMER FLORIDA
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, TALLAHASSEE, FL**

Mr. WINN. Thank you, Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen, and members of the committee, for the invitation to share with you Florida's approach to disaster relief. I will focus my remarks primarily on the time in which I was commissioner from 2004 to 2007, experiencing four hurricanes in 2004, Hurricane Charley, Frances, Jeanne, and Ivan, that devastated the State of Florida.

To give you a sense of that level of devastation or effect on schools, we had 13 school districts that lost more than 10 days of school and a number of them 3 weeks to 4 weeks of school.

The hurricanes crisscrossed Florida for the large part, so 3 weeks after Charley we were hit with another hurricane, and then another and another, over a period of 48 days.

Florida has an emergency management system that runs simulations of disasters and as well as recovery efforts, and the Department of Education is a partner in that effort.

We believe that reopening schools quickly is critical, not only for the impact that it has on student learning, but just as importantly, if not more, the impact on children's safety. More injuries and deaths occur after a hurricane than during a hurricane. We felt it was critical to get students back in schools so that they were not playing among debris and dangerous situations.

Also, our relief efforts, in my opinion, in any State in rapid opening of schools must have the leadership of the State Governor. Only the Governor has the authority and ability to mobilize the National Guard and a lot of other partners that we relied on, such as FEMA, USDOE, Agriculture, military, as well as local and State from private sector, as well as thousands of volunteers who come to help cleanup schools to help them reopen.

A quick and comprehensive reopening of schools after a disaster requires not a set of activities that are linear, but rather a set of activities for reopening schools that are actually all happening at the same level.

Some of the things we learned was that school personnel were not able to utilize outside assistance the day after the hurricane struck. You have shock. You have needing time to assess their damages so that they know what type of help they need, as well as taking care of, for school personnel, many of their personal and family issues.

We learned that it is important to have a single point of contact from the Department of Education to each school district that is affected. That facilitates communication and keeps the messages very clear, so we can act on them expeditiously.

Another thing we learned is school districts, at least at that time, were not really used to getting help from outside, particularly for nontraditional areas, such as the National Guard, private industry, calling in to support what we were doing. So one of the things that

we did was we brought partners to school district planning meetings to explain to district leadership how they could, in fact, help the recovery efforts in many ways.

We also learned that virtually everyone was willing to help if contacted by the Governor or on behalf of the Governor.

I gave you a list in my written testimony of a number of activities. I will highlight just a couple.

Florida is a growth State and we use a lot of what we call relocatable classrooms to accommodate that growth because a school building cannot keep up with State growth.

So when Hurricane Charley and the other three hurricanes hit, we needed to mobilize to use relocatable classrooms. We contacted the five major manufacturers and they all said that they were on back order from Florida. And so we called the Superintendents Association and requested that they redirect some of their relocatable classrooms to the affected areas, and they happily complied with that request.

There were a number of issues that needed to be waived, regulations through the Governor's authority, as an emergency management situation.

And I will be happy to answer further questions.

[The statement of Mr. Winn follows:]

**Testimony of John L. Winn Before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education**

**Hearing: "This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the
Wake of Natural Disasters"**

June 5, 2019

Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee to share Florida's approach to quickly reopening schools after a disaster has forced closure. I will focus on the state of Florida's activities to open schools after hurricanes Charley, Frances, Jeanne, and Ivan devastated much of Florida in 2004.

Florida has a full complement of emergency operations personnel that run simulations of disasters and rescue and recovery activities. These personnel coordinate partnerships with federal, state and local agencies. States rely on federal agencies such as FEMA, US Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, and the military as well as private industry, charities, and volunteer groups to facilitate recovery. Such partnerships are essential for comprehensive disaster relief and opening schools.

Comprehensive school recovery is not possible without the leadership and involvement of the state governor. In 2004 Governor Jeb Bush made disaster relief a top state priority. He directed each state agency head to participate in the effort. For the first time, opening schools became a high priority behind hospitals and nursing homes. Prolonged school closures have serious student learning consequences and present major safety issues for children who may be injured due to storm damage.

What We Learned

We learned that preparation is important. School districts and schools should protect electronics, back up data and financial systems to offsite locations or the cloud, identify and staff schools as emergency shelters, communicate contingencies to parents, protect school buses and other vehicles, and initiate plans for recovery. New technology and social media have made these preparations much easier.

We learned that school personnel are not ready for outside assistance immediately after a hurricane. They need time to recover from shock, assess damage, and deal with personal loss before help can be utilized. Emergency management agencies focused immediately on rescue efforts and providing water, food, medical and other critical needs to affected communities. During that time the Florida Department of Education assigned personnel to serve as primary contacts for each school district.

We learned that most school districts were used to taking care of their own issues and were new to asking for help, especially from nontraditional sources. They needed to

become aware of outside partners who were willing and able to help recovery. Bringing partners to district recovery planning meetings helped to accomplish this goal.

We learned that virtually everyone was willing to help when contacted by the governor or on behalf of the governor.

School Recovery Activities

The following illustrates some of the ways partners and team members contributed to the overall effort to open schools as soon as possible. These partnerships evolved as we examined everything needed for schools to make a smooth transition for faculty, students and parents. 'Return to normalcy' was the organizing principle of recovery.

- State engineers and facilities personnel assisted in damage evaluation and rebuilding plans.
- Relocatable classroom manufacturers had waiting lists for new classrooms so school superintendents scheduled to receive orders agreed to redirect their deliveries to schools needing to reopen.
- Book companies provided books free of charge to students to read while schools were closed. Many were distributed in FEMA-operated food locations.
- The national guard construction units helped clear debris, set up relocatable classrooms, and clear back roads along bus routes.
- The national guard directed traffic, provided extra security, and drove buses in one school district where drivers had gone elsewhere.
- Retailers were asked and agreed to provide computers, backpacks, and school supplies for students and teachers.
- Some newspapers printed age appropriate activity booklets for students to use at home.
- The recovery team called utility company CEO's to speed up providing electricity to schools that were otherwise ready to open.
- Farmers helped with extra fuel to get buses running.
- Colleges and universities granted additional time to complete coursework for soldiers who could not attend classes due to recovery duty.
- The governor signed executive orders to waive state regulations that impeded recovery or would have had other damaging effects on schools.
- The legislature provided gradual decline in funding for districts that lost students due to families relocating.
- Numerous deadlines were extended to give schools additional time to file reports, write grants, and the like.
- Schools in some districts instituted double sessions to get all students back in school sooner.
- Thousands of volunteers donated time to help in virtually every facet of recovery.

Clearly, successful disaster recovery for schools requires a massive coordinated effort by many good people. I am sure that disaster recovery has improved over the years.

Florida has shared its experiences widely which we hope has contributed to this improvement.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Winn.

I now recognize Dr. Herrington for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. STEVE HERRINGTON, PH.D., SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, SONOMA COUNTY SCHOOLS, SANTA ROSA, CA

Mr. HERRINGTON. Thank you.

As an elected county superintendent of schools for Sonoma County, California, it is an honor to share with you the lessons learned from responding to the Tubbs Fire that devastated my community in 2017, and my experiences in helping the other educational leaders with similar disasters, such as the recent catastrophic camp fire in Butte County, as well as Shasta and Ventura Counties.

I commend you for convening this hearing so that educators and emergency response agencies can be better prepared to support schools and children when the next disaster strikes.

In Sonoma County, north of San Francisco, my office is privileged to serve 40 school districts that provide care and education to more than 71,000 students. Some districts are small and rural, serving as few as 10 students, while others are large and urban. Wine country is associated with high wealth, but more than 45 percent of our students are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

In October 2017, our community experienced the Tubbs Fire. At the time, it was the most destructive and catastrophic wildfire in California history.

In my 46 years as an educator, 36 as a superintendent, I have responded to numerous floods and earthquakes, but I have never seen a natural disaster take such a toll on the educational community as did the Tubbs Fire.

The wildfire swept from the dry hills and into the city of Santa Rosa overnight, leaping a six-lane freeway and overwhelming our emergency services, forcing the closure and evacuation of two regional hospitals. It destroyed numerous school sites and the homes of nearly 1,500 students and 250 school employees in Sonoma County.

Wildfires in California that fall resulted in \$8 billion in property damage and more than 40 deaths. Since then, as you know, similar wildfires have burned into California communities, causing even more devastation than ours.

Today, I would like to share with you a few lessons my colleagues and I have learned from these disasters and how I believe the Federal Government can help schools reopen. The committee has a full copy of my report. I will highlight a few items.

Reopening schools. Schools are essential to restoring normalcy within a community. Because of the catastrophic size of our fire, there were unprecedented issues to deal with, such as the ensuring of safety of buildings and dealing with toxic ash and waste debris.

The State convened a special task force to help schools address unanswered questions and reopening. Still, guidance is needed to be provided from EPA on how toxic ash should be dealt with in this situation.

School facilities. When school is destroyed, finding an alternate location to hold classes can be a challenge, especially when 90 percent of the community is destroyed, such as in Paradise, California. If the Federal Government could provide portable classrooms from the Department of Defense—I served in the Army during the Vietnam war—or FEMA, it would greatly resolve this problem and schools could reopen sooner and create a sense of normalcy to a community.

Grants, such as RESTART and Project SERV, are valued and appreciated; however, to enable a school district to best utilize these funds, there needs to be greater flexibility built in to regarding how they can be spent and over what time period.

Disasters like ours and schools have experienced have consequences that unfold for years, and effectively utilizing these funds to address community needs may take longer than the current time constraints on the grants.

Preparation. The likelihood of a similar disaster is very high. A report commissioned by the California recently predicted that if emission trends that lead to climate change continue, the average burn area in California will increase by 77 percent by the end of the century.

My office has applied for a hazard mitigation plan grant after finding that schools are often omitted from county and city plans. We recently learned that schools may be eligible for additional funding in the event of a disaster if they have these plans in place.

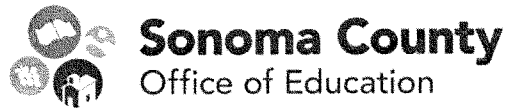
Mental health support. It's effects of trauma on community events are long lasting. Sonoma County Schools are still dealing with a large number of traumatized student staff, with surveys of schools showing that this has a serious and negative impact on students.

Testing waivers were not granted to our schools. We applied for testing waivers to the Federal Government and we did not receive any waivers for testing.

This is true in the Tubbs Fire of this year. So flexibility was not shown there. It was granted by the State of California, but when it went to the Federal Government it did not. And this means those schools will have negative scores posted on their accountability report cards in the State of California.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Herrington follows:]



Statement for House Committee on Education

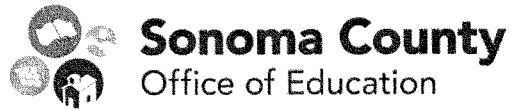
By Steven D. Herrington, Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools

Chairperson Sablan and the members of the committee, good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak today.

As the County Superintendent of Schools in Sonoma County, California, it is an honor to share with you lessons learned from responding to the Tubbs Fire that devastated my community in 2017, as well as my experience helping other educational leaders with similar disasters, such as the catastrophic Camp Fire in Butte County as well as fires in Shasta and Ventura counties. I commend you for convening this hearing so that educators and emergency response agencies can be better prepared to support schools and children when the next disaster strikes.

In Sonoma County, north of San Francisco, my office is privileged to serve 40 school districts that provide care and education to more than 70,000 public school students. Some districts are small and rural, serving as few as ten students, while others are large and urban. Wine country is associated with wealth, but more than 45 percent of our students are socio-economically disadvantaged.

In October 2017, our community experienced the Tubbs Fire. At the time, it was the most destructive wildfire in California history. In my 46 years as an educator (and 36 as a superintendent), I have responded to numerous floods and earthquakes. But I have never seen a natural disaster take such a toll on an educational community as did the Tubbs fire. This wildfire swept from the dry hills and into the city of Santa Rosa overnight, leaping over a six-lane freeway and overwhelming our emergency services. It destroyed numerous school sites and the homes of nearly 1,500 students and 250 school employees in Sonoma County. Our most impacted school districts were closed for three weeks as they dealt with the aftermath. Two schools could not re-open for



months as toxic debris was cleared from the neighborhoods. Wildfires in Northern California that fall resulted in \$8 billion in damages and more than forty deaths. Since then, as you know, similar wildfires have burned into other California communities, causing even more devastation.

I commend educational leaders around California for responding quickly and with innovation to these disasters. These fast-moving, devastating wildfires have brought unprecedented challenges and offered many lessons. Today, I'd like to share with you the lessons I and my colleagues have learned from these disasters and how, I believe, the federal government can best help schools reopen their doors after a large-scale crisis.

1. **Reopening Schools:** Schools play a critical role in restoring normalcy to children's lives and addressing trauma, and it is imperative that local, state, and federal governmental organizations work together to ensure that students can return to class as quickly and safely as possible after a disaster. There are protocols for ensuring safety and reopening school sites after earthquakes, but prior to the October 2017 Tubbs fire, none were in place for opening school sites impacted by toxic ash, debris, and smoke. A special state task force convened by the California Department of Education and Office of Emergency Services was very helpful in assisting districts to find solutions. However, I believe that a state or federal standard is needed that can guide a school district superintendent through the process of determining whether it is safe to reopen school after a wildfire. Also, guidance is needed for districts and counties from the Environmental Protection Agency regarding how toxic ash should be dealt with.
2. **School Facilities:** When a school is in a fire's path, the biggest obstacle to reopening is finding a physical location to hold classes. Following the Tubbs Fire, public schools that burned were fortunate to find alternate facilities within their school districts, but the same was not true in the Camp Fire in Butte County. It



took weeks to find facilities, such as converted warehouses. If the federal government could provide portable structures that meet required standards to serve as temporary school facilities, it would greatly increase the speed with which school could return to session.

3. **Grants:** School districts were very grateful for financial assistance provided through grants such as Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations (RESTART) and School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV). However, timing presents a significant challenge in funding emergency response and recovery activities. Schools and districts must work concurrently with their insurance provider, FEMA, and state and federal government partners to determine how and when expenses will be reimbursed—without clearly defined limits and few assurances. This can result in a lack of certainty and underused funds. In Sonoma County, insurance companies paid schools more than \$7.1 million to cover losses/damages. To date, only one school district in Sonoma County has received any funding from Project SERV/RESTART as of today. That district, Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified, received \$12,219. The CDE estimates that between the Emergency Impact Aid grant, Restart, and Project SERV, Sonoma County schools have received about \$2 million in recovery grant funds. The majority of grant funding came from the Emergency Impact Aid (EIA) program.

Flexibility for states to repurpose unused funds (within the limits of the grant criteria and under consultation with the Education Department) would expedite the flow of reimbursements to impacted communities. Additionally, federal disaster grants could be utilized more effectively if they provided greater flexibility on the use of funds over time. For instance, under the RESTART grant, “initiating and maintaining education and support services” is an eligible expense. It is also a long-term undertaking following a major disaster. Extending the grant period by 1-2 years would provide sustained support to address unmet needs as schools adapt to their “new normal.” Programs should give school leaders the time they need to assess the full breadth of impacts with confidence that funding



will be available to meet students' needs. The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) has requested that Congress allow for extended time to use federal grant funds allocated for the 2017 fires as well as grant the ability to use these funds for 2018 fires. Their request is included at the end of my testimony.

4. **Reimbursement:** Some of our schools found that they were not able to be reimbursed for expenses that quickly accumulated after opening to the community as emergency shelters because the proper chain of command could not be identified after the fact, even though the request had come from the Office of Emergency Services. Most school leaders are not emergency professionals. In the middle of a chaotic situation, those responding, filling out forms, and completing processes will not always be able to follow every protocol 100 percent correctly. However, schools provided a valuable and needed service to the community and deserve to be reimbursed. We ask that there be additional understanding and flexibility built into the FEMA reimbursement process that accounts for these factors and allow for small variances from standards. For instance, an exception form could be provided to allow schools to make the case for funding in the event that needed documentation was lost. Additionally, we ask that FEMA consider providing or reimbursing school districts for the use of experts and/or consultants to help navigate the federal recovery process. Emergency disaster experts and consultants can be a much-needed resource for administrators while they tend to their regular responsibilities in addition to addressing heightened student needs, often for months or years.
5. **Preparation:** Unfortunately, the likelihood of similar disasters impacting other educational communities in the months and years ahead is very high. A report commissioned by the state of California recently predicted that, if emissions trends that lead to climate change continue at their current pace, the average burn area in California will increase 77 percent by the end of the century. My office is working with CCSESA to develop a toolkit for county offices that can be



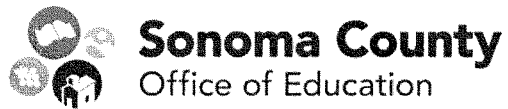
used in future wildfire disasters. I encourage the federal government to consider developing a similar toolkit that can help schools prepare for and respond to wildfires. Additionally, FEMA could increase its outreach to schools to inform them of the ways that they can prepare for a disaster. My office has applied for a grant to create a hazard mitigation plan for all the schools in Sonoma County. Generally, schools are omitted from county and city hazard mitigation plans. We recently learned that schools are eligible for dedicated FEMA recovery funds if they have a hazard mitigation plan in place when disaster strikes. This kind of information is important to share widely. Additionally, it would be helpful for FEMA and the Education Department to coordinate more closely on disaster response and school safety.

6. **Support Testing Waivers for Impacted Communities:** Following the October 2017 wildfires, the largest school district in Sonoma County requested a waiver for spring standardized testing. The district's schools had been closed for three weeks during the disaster and students were still behind in their curriculum. Additionally, the district did not wish to further stress its traumatized students and staff with the anxiety of testing. When fewer than 95 percent of students are tested, ESSA requires that states are asked to reflect low participation in the school district's ratings. The federal department of education did not grant the district's request for a testing waiver. As a result, the district was given all orange scores on the state's accountability metric (the second to lowest performance category). This provided false and unhelpful data that will skew the district's accountability ratings for two full years based on the way school success is measured in California. As well, it makes it more difficult for the district to use the test scores for their intended purpose—identifying which student groups are struggling so that they can be provided targeted assistance. This problem isn't unique to Sonoma County. Schools in Paradise, California, where the Camp Fire struck last fall, were also unable to test. The same has been true following other natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. A large-scale disaster has serious and long-lasting impacts on the academic and emotional well-being of a school



community, and school testing policies need to be sensitive to that. We propose that the federal government give states local control in deciding when testing waivers are appropriate following a disaster.

7. **Mental Health Support:** The mental health effects of a traumatic event such as a fire are far-reaching and long-lasting. Sonoma County schools are still dealing with students and staff who have been traumatized. These impacts hamper a student's ability to learn and an educator's ability to teach. In a recent survey we conducted, Sonoma County school districts reported that more than 2,900 of the county's 70,000 students were still exhibiting increased anxiety, stress, depression, behavioral problems, or decreased academic performance as a result of the 2017 wildfire. The same was true for more than 400 school employees. A superintendent with one large school district wrote, "There is a significant increase in fear, anxiety, and the near inability to navigate through changes and 'unknown' situations. Kids are exhibiting far more 'giving up' than ever seen prior to 2017." Most concerning, he added that there had been a significant increase in suicidal threats or attempts. Another school superintendent expressed a common concern that long-term emotional stress will continue to show up and be exacerbated by other significant fires within or outside the county. This was clearly seen last year when heavy, toxic smoke from the Camp Fire descended on our community. Teachers reported kindergarten children crying and running inside after seeing the smoke while on the playground. Staff and parents were equally stressed. My organization was fortunate to benefit from private grants that allowed us to contract with experts and provide training and resources to local schools and families. Not every impacted community has been this lucky. Now that our grant funds are expiring, I am hopeful that we may have access to federal RESTART grants to pay for counselors to provide additional support for the coming school year. This opportunity is being coordinated through the California Department of Education. I encourage you to consider creating a dedicated source of funding for this. Schools would welcome any financial assistance that the federal government could provide in order to fund sustained



counseling and mental health support for a minimum of three years. Addressing student and teacher trauma will enable our communities to heal and our students to thrive and develop resilience in the face of adversity.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Dr. Herrington.

Under Committee Rule 8(a), we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule. As chair, I have decided to go at the end, so I will yield to Mr. Morelle, who will be followed by the ranking member, Mr. Allen. We will then alternate between the parties.

But, Commissioner Muña, my apologies, when it is my time to question, for questioning, we would have your video—I mean, your slide show on. We were not able to do that.

So Mr. Morelle, you have 5 minutes, please.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman again. Thank you for what is a really very enlightening and important hearing.

And thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My first question was actually going to be, what are the direct impacts that you have observed of natural disasters on the student experience? And I think, Dr. Herrington, you certainly, I think, detailed at the end of your testimony exactly some of the things that you have seen. So I will pass on that.

But I do thank you, because I think sometimes we think of these big picture things, understandably, we think about buildings, facilities. This is really about children as well, more importantly than anything, and talking about those impacts, I think, was very, very important.

I am curious, and this may be more for you, Dr. Herrington, as a school superintendent, how have the disasters that you have faced changed your approach to preparedness? And do students feel a sense of preparedness, or are they not likely in the moment to be thinking about that?

Mr. HERRINGTON. Well, we have applied for a preparation grant that I told you about earlier, which was not known to us at the time. And I think FEMA and the Department of Education needs to make a proactive approach to that so districts can prepare for those grants—our application is pending for this year—because cities and counties apply for it, but they often forget to bring the school system into the planning.

Another one of your questions was as it deals with the impact on students. The Tubbs Fire, which occurred this year, I don't know if you had the chance to see the aerial view of the wind pattern, but all the smoke from the Tubbs Fire, which was in Butte County, landed for some reason in Sonoma County.

Now, we are 250 miles away from Butte County, but the residual impact was there, and it came in October when our fire occurred. So you want to see trauma reenacted? Children, once again, started to panic.

So planning for these type of things, we are doing long-term psychological training for teachers on how to deal with trauma in the classroom.

Mr. MORELLE. And you are doing this in anticipation of further events, so you are doing it proactively.

Mr. HERRINGTON. I anticipate further. This is a proactive event. We train every year now.

Mr. MORELLE. Good.

I am interested, clearly, the importance of making schools safer and more resilient. I mentioned this a little earlier when the Assistant Secretary was here.

In my previous experience as Insurance Chair of the New York State Assembly, this was a big issue for hurricanes and other disasters at the State level, how to improve school buildings, make them safer proactively, so that they are more resilient, that we have less property damage, but less of an impact on health and safety.

What would it mean for your school districts—and I am happy to hear answers from any of your observations—to receive support from the Federal Government to improve your existing school infrastructure in anticipation?

Anyone?

Dr. Herrington, you obviously have physical facilities.

Mr. HERRINGTON. Okay. California has the Field Act, which is a very stringent act for earthquakes. We are very prepared for earthquakes and we deal with them all the time.

But I will tell you that, from my perspective, it is for preparation of a facility in California. I don't think it is as needed. I think the islands here seem to have more of a need for Federal Government because of the Commonwealth standing for that. And so I would defer to Dr. Muña if he might wish to speak to that.

Mr. MORELLE. Yes, Commissioner, do you have observations about that in terms of creating greater resiliency in a proactive way prior to natural disasters hitting?

Mr. MUÑA. Well, one of the things that I mentioned in my oral testimony is really taking a look at our islands. So we know that we are prone to more typhoons. We need to harden our roofs, get rid of all the tin roofs, and just put concrete. Make it really sustainable to withstand stronger winds.

The buildings that were damaged were really those buildings that had tin roofs and also some of them that were wooden. Those were all the ones that were really severely damage.

Mr. MORELLE. So support from the Federal Government potentially to be able to deal with some of those issues prior to additional episodes would be, I assume, welcome on your part?

Mr. MUÑA. Well, I am also thinking of, like, the FEMA requirement beyond the tarps and plywood. That is considered temporary repair. If we want to do the needed repairs and do permanent repairs then that tends to limit the amount in terms—or our chances of applying for hazard mitigation. So maybe a little more flexibility in regards to that.

Mr. MORELLE. Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Mr. Morelle.

I now recognize the distinguished ranking member for his 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Winn, I know, and of course you shared in your testimony that you were Commissioner during a particularly difficult hurricane period for Florida. You mentioned in your testimony four hurricanes that struck the State in 2004, and I think hearing a little more about these would give the subcommittee a better understanding of the magnitude of the challenge State and local officials face.

Can you tell us what the extent of the damage to the schools resulting from those hurricanes in more detail?

And also, I want to give credit to the State of Florida for your excellent response. I have heard about the readiness and many of the things that you did to make sure that any future disasters are dealt with in an appropriate way.

So if you could go into more detail on that, I think it would be helpful for us.

Mr. WINN. Thank you for the question.

The devastation in Florida was just incredible. We had \$48 billion worth of damage in the State of Florida in a period of basically 48, 50 days.

And so if you can imagine, particularly, we had swaths through, when Hurricane Charley hit in Charlotte County, Punta Gorda on the western side of Florida below Tampa, went across the State, virtually obliterated all of the mobile home parks in its path.

Charlotte County completely lost the use of 8 of its 16 schools. And we worked with a variety of partners and the school district to establish double sessions. So, the remaining eight schools had to work on double sessions, starting earlier in the morning and then the second session in the afternoon.

One of the things that we realized there were the school bus routes were not limited to just the main roads. Cities and counties, their top priorities for getting traffic moving are their main roads. We had people living out in the rural areas through dirt roads and everywhere else.

So we got the school districts, and we did this for all of them, got the school districts' bus routes, and since our National Guard was mobilized, they have a construction team in Florida they call the RED HORSE Construction, who cleared those roads so that school buses, when the schools were ready to open, the school busses could get there.

We had 8.5 million people in Florida, families in Florida, were without electricity, and that was at a time when Florida had 16 million people. So we had 9.5 million people evacuate at some time during that summer.

So you can see basically half of Florida was affected. We had every school district in Florida lost at least 1 day due to hurricane or closing in anticipation of a hurricane.

Preparation at that time, unfortunately, was nowhere near what it is today. For example, in Hurricane Charley, it was supposed to hit, according to all the predictions, supposed to hit Tampa, and it took a sharp right turn and hit Charlotte County instead. So Charlotte County had not really prepared.

So the cone, although that is very helpful to have a cone in your—people are really focused on whether it is going to hit their particular school district. And Florida has very large school districts, only 67 in the State.

So the devastation, every hurricane had different problem areas. Hurricane Charley was wind damage, Hurricane Frances and Jeanne flooding, and not only flooding at the time because of the rain, but flooding because of swollen rivers. I can remember walking through four, five, six inches of water in elementary schools and middle schools.

Mr. ALLEN. I am just about out of time.

How did you coordinate all these partnerships? In other words, somebody had to be directing the efforts of the National Guard. And we have got 4 seconds to answer that.

Mr. WINN. Well, the Governor assigned me to coordinate for purposes of opening schools.

Mr. ALLEN. So you did it all.

Mr. WINN. So, we established a contact for each school district, and I personally went to school districts to meet with superintendents on their needs.

All these partnerships don't happen by accident. Somebody has to invite or request. We had a lot of private companies providing free books to students while they were out of school. We had companies donating backpacks, school supplies, not just for students but for teachers as well when they went back to school.

Mr. ALLEN. I am out of time.

Mr. WINN. We were incredibly fortunate to have those kinds of reactions and partners.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Mr. Allen.

I would now like to recognize Mr. Scott for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Soto-Thomas, your testimony was cutoff because it was going over 5 minutes. Was there something you were not able to say?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Well, one of the major issues that we are facing in the Virgin Islands is, of course, we have heard it over and over again, is—

Chairman SABLAN. Is your button on? Can you turn it on? Thank you.

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Thank you.

One of the major issues that we continue to deal with in the Virgin Islands is, you know, the slowness of the FEMA monies coming to the Virgin Islands, the release of funds, the drawing down of funds, and that has been happening since the storm.

And members and citizens, parents, my members, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff are very concerned because we are approaching summer, we have about 2 weeks left of school, and there is no plan in place for the repair of our buildings.

A lot of the members continue to get sick and, you know, we continue to want answers. We want communication to flow smoothly. We are not getting updates in terms of the FEMA monies.

And the Department does not, apparently, have a plan. They don't have a clear plan in place as to what maintenance is going to take place over the summer.

There is always this talk about temporary versus permanent repairs, and I am not certain where we are with that. But it is very confusing because many people continue to conduct assessment of our schools, and we are not seeing results at the level that we need to.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, and how is that affecting the students' ability to learn?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Well, it is affecting it because a lot of them are out sick. Those who have respiratory problems like asthma and whatnot, they are out sick on a regular basis.

And right now—well, prior to—I guess about 2 months ago, there were major problems with the water situation, water pressure, water pressure on the island, and that caused the schools to be canceled regularly. But since then, I am glad to report that the Governor got some pumps fixed, and so the system is working. But there is still a lot of rust in the water that is coming through the pipes.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, how is all of this affecting test scores?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. I would assume that it is affecting test scores, because when following the storms we were in split sessions. Kids only received 4 hours of instruction immediately following the storm, so they lost a lot of instructional time. So definitely I would think that would have a great impact on scores, on their performance.

Mr. SCOTT. Is there any effort to use the summer to try to catch up?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. I know there are some summer camps that are planned, but I don't know the extent of it, I mean, how many students will be accommodated, if they are funding to accommodate a great number. I am not certain about that at this time.

Mr. SCOTT. I think it was your testimony that suggested that some post-traumatic stress was occurring.

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Correct.

Mr. SCOTT. What kind of educational strategy will be used to address this trauma?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Well, I know that the union is trying to get some assistance in terms of the post-traumatic stress disorder because we started to experience a lot of winds and rain. Now we are in the hurricane season. It started June 1. So, the fears and anxieties are emerging again. And I am hoping that the Department of Education in the Virgin Islands is also looking at that.

The issue is collaboration. I am hoping that they collaborate with the unions more. And we have a partner with—we have a relationship with the Department of Health, the union, so we are reaching out to them in that regard also and talking to the Commissioner of Education to ensure that these programs become available for the students of the Virgin Islands to address the post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. SCOTT. Before they can get to the students, they have to get to the teachers. Is there technical assistance to inform teachers how to deal with students who have experienced trauma?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. I believe that there are programs in place. As a school psychologist, when I worked, there is a referral process. If teachers see students exhibiting, you know, certain behaviors, then referrals are put in place so students can be referred to respective agencies or what have you.

But to say that there is a major contracting of psychologists or counselors or what have you, I haven't heard of that happening.

Mr. SCOTT. Or working with teachers so they will be empowered to deal with students who have been subject to trauma?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. I want to add that teachers have access to counseling. The insurance that the employer provides gives them that latitude. There are a number of visits that they can have to a counselor if they choose to.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Chairman, could I just make a quick point?

In teaching, there are ways of teaching students who have been exposed to trauma, and I think we need to make sure that is available, that strategy that teachers could use would be available.

I appreciate your indulgence.

Chairman SABLAN. The chairman's point is very well noted.

I would now like to recognize Mr. Taylor. I thought you switched sides, but I guess you went back.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thinking about it.

Chairman SABLAN. Mr. Taylor for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to build on Chairman's Scott line of questioning, Mr. Winn. In terms of thinking about school districts that suspend education because of a disaster, what are you seeing, and how do you think about helping students who miss 3 weeks, a month, 2 months of school? Are you extending the school days? Are you extending the school year? Are you doing afterschool programs based on testing performance? How do you think about making up the time that is lost as a result of a disaster?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Well, I—

Mr. TAYLOR. I am sorry. That was for Mr. Winn. I was asking about Florida.

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Oh, Okay.

Mr. TAYLOR. I was thinking about a Statewide question. Are you doing that by—is it district by district, county by county? Is there a Statewide answer? How are you thinking about that?

Mr. WINN. Yes. That was a huge issue. Legislation, our statutes in Florida require that students receive 180 days of instruction during the school year. So the school calendars are already set.

Mr. TAYLOR. Does it stipulate the number of hours per day?

Mr. WINN. A hundred and 80 days.

Mr. TAYLOR. But not the number of hours?

Mr. WINN. Five and a half hours a day.

Mr. TAYLOR. Five and a half hours of instruction or time on campus.

Mr. WINN. Yes. So that was a big issue. There was already legislation that allowed up to 3 days for disasters. That was clearly not enough. And as a part of my authorization as Commissioner of Education by the Governor, I was able to negotiate with school districts how they would use either extra hour during the day or some of the breaks during the school year, where schools would normally be closed, they would be open.

And also to negotiate a larger amount of time—a shorter amount of time. So, for example, many school districts, instead of only getting 3 days may have gotten 6, 6 days of waiver of the school year.

Interesting to note that our 13 districts, school districts, that had 10 or more days in which schools were closed, those students in the State assessment program outgained, in terms of reading and mathematics, outgained the State average, each and every one of them.

And I attribute that to the tremendous work of the school personnel and teachers who realized that they were sort of behind the eight ball with regard to loss of instructional time, and I think they redoubled efforts to improve instruction.

I think students were happy to be back in school, a sense of normalcy, for air conditioning if for nothing else.

But anyway, all of the reports were that the students were doing well. And, of course, we had upgraded counseling services for students who had issues of loss at home and needed some counseling to help them through those.

Mr. TAYLOR. Well, let me just say that is really inspiring, and it sounds like you have done the longitudinal study to determine the performance of the districts where there were losses of time. Is that correct?

Mr. WINN. Yes.

Mr. TAYLOR. Okay.

If you could share that report with us, and I will speak for Chairman Scott. I think he is interested in seeing that as well, based on his previous questioning, because that is interesting to us.

And so it's not just they are going back to school, they are actually extending the day or putting more instruction time into the day, so you are going from 5 and a half hours of instruction to 6 or 6 and a half? Is that accurate? Is that what is happening?

Mr. WINN. Yes. Each school district had their own plan on how to extend, how to meet that requirement. So we negotiated, depending on their own calendars, how many breaks they had and those kinds of things.

So we negotiated to get—our goal is to have as many days, as many instructional hours as possible with all the students, but to also be realistic in resetting those schedules.

As you know, schedules, once they are set, it could be very controversial with parents and vacations and all that goes on with school breaks and that sort of thing. So each school district had its own kind of tailored plan to help get students in schools for the full year.

Mr. TAYLOR. All right. Well, thank you very much. That is very informative testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

At this time, I would like to recognize Ms. Schrier for her 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

Dr. Herrington, I have some questions specifically for you. You are from California, you have gone through a ton of wildfires. I am from Washington State, and we are experiencing some of the same, not to the same degree. But climate is changing, and we are now at a point where our family plans our road trips based on when fires happen.

I represent a district that straddles the Cascade Mountains, and so I live in the western or wet part of the State, where you would think we would be absolutely insulated from fire, but that has changed. As of April, we now have high risk areas even in western Washington.

When you cross the Cascades, it is the dry part of the State, fires every year, absolutely predictable. And we have forests that need management. We are looking at a tinder box over there.

We have stretched resources and firefighters who are thinking they might not be able to go to the next California fire because they will be busy in our own State.

My son spent the first couple weeks of the last couple years at PE having to be in the gym with hundreds of other kids because they couldn't go outside.

And so, I wanted to just ask you as we get further into this scenario what you would recommend for us because we may have this fire season going into September, even October, how we can best help our students in western and eastern Washington.

Mr. HERRINGTON. Well, first of all, I relied on Washington for the air quality index. Yours is one of the few States that has an air quality index for schools. And we had the smoke from the Butte fire come into ours, so we had to use that as a guideline.

But I think every school district in the State of California has now given guidelines, needs to set air quality control index standards for fires so you know what is safe for children and the exposure level.

Whatever rate you set, I will tell you this as a superintendent, it is not going to be the right rate for some parents. And I advise parents who have children with asthma, you are a parent, take control, decide what is safe for your child. If you keep them home, it is an excused absence. But whatever you set won't be satisfactory because I have been there.

But I would also tell you that we are going through in California an extended fire season. We have extended our fire season. So we have gone through training for evacuation, what does every household have ready to go. We learned that from Florida. And so we picked up on other States what they have done, because we have never had a fire season as horrific as this past one.

And you need to know about evacuation patterns and routes. You want to move a community. I had to house 20,000 residents. That was the call I got at 1 a.m. in the morning: Dr. Herrington, open the schools because we need to put shelters in place.

How do you get them there? And the routes are all jammed because everyone is evacuating a fire that is moving one football field a minute through your community because of the winds. Use your school buses. So we have learned that school buses are a resource to our main transportation system.

Now, in the Butte fire, the buses actually melted on the road, because the tires were melting because the fire was so hot. So you had to get the children off the bus and into private cars to get them out.

But I will tell you that you need to have an evacuation pattern for schools. And it came to our benefit this year when we had floods. I mean, we got hit with fires. Now we have a flood.

And so when the Russian River flooded in Sonoma County, we knew how to evacuate in the middle of the day, what routes to use. We have a communication system with the California Highway Patrol.

So having your resources connected is important. Having schools in your command center for emergency services is essential. And we are advising our local schools that if you are in a city jurisdiction, that you should be part of the city's command center. It is not an afterthought, because schools create normalcy, as we were talking about, and you need to reopen schools as soon as possible because it gives children a sense of security.

So those are some of the key things is, do you have an evacuation plan? Do you have an air quality control index plan? How do you reopen a school that has air and ash? Once again, ash is a big thing if it is a residential fire. So I hope that gives you some guidance.

Ms. SCHRIER. That was really helpful. Thank you.

I yield back my time.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much.

Now I will claim my 5 minutes for questioning.

I am going to give a minute each to Superintendent Herrington, Ms. Soto, and then I come to Commissioner Muña, because you all mentioned in your testimonies about addressing the mental health of your students and school staff. I am following up with Mr. Taylor and Bobby Scott's questioning.

There is no question trauma impacts a student's ability to learn and an educator's ability to teach. Now, what I want to know is, starting with Dr. Herrington, what I want to know is how each of your schools have approached addressing this need and the source of funding? How would you assess the Federal Government's response to addressing mental health at your schools? One minute.

Mr. HERRINGTON. We are using Project SERV funds as much as possible. We have reapplied for an extension of those funds with the State of California.

But basically I have 4,000 students impacted by trauma, they are still recorded, they are still on our records, and over 400 teachers or public employees, school employees, that are still impacted from the fires.

Chairman SABLAN. And you have access to private professionals?

Mr. HERRINGTON. With the cooperation from New York Life Insurance, we have created a trauma support system. They have an outreach grant. Medtronics has an outreach grant. So we have gotten private funding, public funding to extend those behavioral health counselors.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you.

Ms. Soto-Thomas, same question. How does your school approach addressing this need and the source of funding? And how would you assess the Federal Government's response to addressing mental health at your schools?

Ms. Soto-Thomas. Well, like I mentioned earlier, the health insurance that is offered to the members of the AFT, it comes with sessions. If teachers feel the need to attend sessions, they can. It comes at no cost.

But I do see a greater need in terms of our students to build resiliency. And we are in that hurricane season right now. There are a lot of challenges because a lot of our homes are not fixed.

Chairman SABLAN. Right. But you have private providers.

Ms. Soto-Thomas. We do have private providers for the teachers, all right, and paraprofessionals. I am not certain how much of the mental health services in the community are being offered to the children of the Virgin Islands, Okay, because the hospital isn't fixed yet. I mean, there are many challenges that we have on the island right now. They are still erecting the modular hospital.

So there are a number of challenges, but I would assume that the health commissioner is actively engaged in that process. I may be unaware of it.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. I need to move.

Mr. Muña, in working with our veterans, I know we have hardly any mental professionals in the private sector. So, I want to know how your schools are addressing this need for mental counseling and the source of funding. How do you assess the Federal Government's response to addressing mental health at public school systems?

Mr. MUÑA. So within a month after our typhoon, I mentioned that we were able to secure funding through Project SERV. We were able to hire two mental health counselors that have been working with our students and our staff and their families.

In addition to that, those two mental health counselors are working with our school counselors to provide them with training and support so that they can reach more students and staffs and their families.

Chairman SABLAN. But those two aren't enough for students, let alone the teachers.

Mr. MUÑA. So that's the reason. And that is true. But that's the reason why that they are also working with other counselors, our school counselors.

Chairman SABLAN. And your slides are coming up at the same time, Commissioner.

Commissioner, can you tell the committee more about the FEMA tents which Hopwood Middle School students are learning in? And how does this learning environment affect the student grades, attendance, and teachers? Are there aspects of the school's curriculum that has to be changed as a result? Am I going to attend graduation at Hopwood or at where they are now?

Mr. MUÑA. Well as the panel up here or the witnesses mentioned, opening the schools really determines how fast we are able to get that sense of normalcy to our students and the families. That we took into consideration when we were coordinating with FEMA.

At the time when we started to work on trying to identify a location for Hopwood Middle School, we were looking at Project SERV and the availability of commercial buildings. That was not available at that time that we were trying to build our schools.

So what we ended up doing was we coordinated with FEMA, looked at different contractors that were able to provide the facilities that we needed. And that is why we ended up going with the Alaska model, 42 tents, that were made available to the public school system.

Attendance. We did see a decrease of students coming to school only because we also had to relocate from the central part of the island down to the southern part of the island.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. And, Commissioner, chairmanship doesn't give me extra time, but I will say that in one of your concerns, about building resilient schools, Chairman Scott and I and some of our committee members introduced RASA, a bill to provide \$100 billion for exactly that purpose. We are hoping we could get it out of committee, onto the floor, and out of the House and actually past Congress. Thank you very much.

Let me go to the admin stuff for now. I remind my colleagues that, pursuant to committee practice, materials for submission for the hearing record must be submitted to the committee clerk within 14 days following the last day of the hearing, preferably in Microsoft Word format.

The material submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing. Only a member of the committee or an invited witness may submit materials for inclusion in the hearing record.

Documents are limited to 50 pages each. Documents longer than 50 pages will be incorporated into the record via an internet link that you must provide the committee clerk within the required timeframe. But please recognize that years from now that link may no longer work.

Again, I want to thank the witnesses for their participation today. What we have heard is very valuable. Members of the committee may have some additional questions for you, and we ask the witnesses to please respond to those questions in writing. The hearing record will be held open for 14 days in order to receive those responses.

I remind my colleagues that, pursuant to committee practice, witness questions for the hearing record must be submitted to the majority committee staff or committee clerk within 7 days. The questions submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing.

And I now recognize my friend, the distinguished ranking member, for his closing statement.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I, too, want to thank the witnesses for being here today and taking your valuable time to share with us some of these events that have taken place, these disasters in your communities. I also want to thank Assistant Secretary Brogan for being here earlier.

We've learned that local and State leadership is critically important to effective disaster preparation and recovery. We've also learned that the Department of Education is working to expand its capacity for supporting State and local preparation and recovery efforts.

I look forward to working with the Department and State and local constituents to ensure that they have the flexibility under Federal law, under our jurisdiction, they need to expedite recovery efforts as much as possible.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, and I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Allen.

And now my closing statement.

I want to thank all our witnesses for your willingness to share difficult memories of recovering. I want to thank Secretary Brogan

for also being here. And you're helping students recover from natural catastrophe.

Today's hearing examined the Federal Government's response to school communities devastated by recent natural disasters, Super Typhoon Yutu in the Northern Mariana Islands, Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands, and the Tubbs and Camp Fires in Northern California.

The challenges our witnesses recounted today of restoring classrooms weeks or even months after natural disasters are nothing short of harrowing. From rebuilding entire schools in Saipan to battling toxic air quality in Sonoma County, already undersupported school communities have disproportionately suffered the devastation of natural crisis.

More importantly, our discussions today reveal that while these communities have demonstrated resilience and strength in recovery, they have had to do so largely without the Federal support they deserve and need. The Trump administration continues to deny the reality of climate change and ignore its own research proving that climate change is making natural disasters more destructive.

And Republican lawmakers, most of, not all, have repeatedly blocked passage of a key disaster aid bill that would have dedicated the funds necessary to help impacted communities recover. That one actually occurred just last Monday.

As the climate change crisis continues to worsen, Congress and this committee must commit to investing in public school infrastructure, ensuring vital resources for school communities recovering from natural disasters and putting the victims of national disasters before politics.

All school communities deserve the assurance that the Federal Government will aid them in time of need and crisis. Only when we fulfill this promise can we ensure that students, families, and school staff not only get back on their feet after natural disasters, but stand stronger than ever.

Thank you again to our witnesses.

Thank you for the members, for their indulgence.

There being no further business, and without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Questions submitted for the record and their responses follow:]



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND LABOR
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2176 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

July 23, 2019

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FRED KELLER, PENNSYLVANIA

The Honorable Frank T. Brogan
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and
Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Assistant Secretary Brogan,

I would like to thank you for testifying at the June 5, 2019, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing "*This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural Disasters.*"

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Tuesday, July 30, 2019, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Loredana Valtierra of the Committee staff. She can be contacted at 202-225-3725 should you have any questions.

I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman

Enclosure

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing
*“This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural
Disasters.”*

Wednesday, June 5, 2019
9:00 a.m.

Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)

- Assistant Secretary Brogan, I asked you about the effect of natural disasters on student achievement. You testified that the Department does not study student achievement data of disaster-impacted schools yet. When will the Department be able to investigate that data and report it so that we can 1) understand the impact of natural disasters on student achievement and 2) allocate additional resources to areas that show regression or no growth in achievement, if necessary?
- Assistant Secretary Brogan, the National Climate Assessment released by the Trump Administration warned that climate change is going to have an increasing impact on losses to American infrastructure and property. The Assessment also advises that substantial efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could help reverse that. As this will require action on behalf of every agency, can you provide what the Department is doing to reverse the effects of climate change?
- Assistant Secretary Brogan, the Department’s Office of Inspector General conducted an audit into whether the U.S. Virgin Islands has effectively designed internal controls for the administration of the Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations (RESTART) program funds. The U.S. Virgin Islands received \$13.1 million in funding. OIG found that the Virgin Islands DOE does not have the fiscal and programmatic monitoring processes in place to provide reasonable assurance that it can spend the funds in a timely manner and ensure the funds’ effective use. This means schools could experience a delay in assistance to return to normal operations. What kind of technical assistance is the Department providing to the Territories to ensure they can use the funds with fidelity for the best interest of their schools?



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FRED KELLER, PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. John L. Winn, M.A.
Former Florida Commissioner of Education
Retired
1006 Brookwood Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308

Dear Mr. Winn,

I would like to thank you for testifying at the June 5, 2019, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing "*This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural Disasters.*"

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Tuesday, July 30, 2019, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Loredana Valtierra of the Committee staff. She can be contacted at 202-225-3725 should you have any questions.

I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman

Enclosure

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing
*“This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural
Disasters.”*
Wednesday, June 5, 2019
9:00 a.m.

Representative Van Taylor (R-TX)

- Mr. Winn, thank you for your testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee on June 5, 2019. Based on our discussion at hearing, I would like to follow up to formally request the data and longitudinal study that you referenced regarding the performance of students in school districts in which there were losses of classroom time due to natural disasters. Thank you again for your testimony.

[Mr. Brogan's response to questions submitted for the record follows:]

Questions for the Record
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing
"This is Not a Drill: Education-Related Response and Recovery in the Wake of Natural Disasters."
Wednesday, June 5, 2019

Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)

Assistant Secretary Brogan, I asked you about the effect of natural disasters on student achievement. You testified that the Department does not study student achievement data of disaster-impacted schools yet. When will the Department be able to investigate that data and report it so that we can 1) understand the impact of natural disasters on student achievement and 2) allocate additional resources to areas that show regression or no growth in achievement, if necessary?

Response: While all States and school districts report achievement data annually, I believe that it would be very difficult, from a methodological perspective, to evaluate the impact of natural disasters on student achievement in a manner sufficiently rigorous to support meaningful conclusions. To give just one example, a decline in student achievement following a significant natural disaster could be attributed more to the displacement of certain groups of students than to the impact of the disaster on classroom instruction. In addition, other factors related to recovery from a natural disaster, such as the replacement of curricula or instructional materials, or factors unrelated to the disaster, such as a previously planned change in assessments, could make it difficult or impossible to generate comparable achievement data in the school years following a disaster.

Assistant Secretary Brogan, the National Climate Assessment released by the Trump Administration warned that climate change is going to have an increasing impact on losses to American infrastructure and property. The Assessment also advises that substantial efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could help reverse that. As this will require action on behalf of every agency, can you provide what the Department is doing to reverse the effects of climate change?

Response: As an agency, the Department continues to improve its sustainability efforts. Specifically, the Department is working with the General Services Administration to reduce its real estate footprint and continue efforts to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. From FY 2017 to FY 2018, the Department had a 1.4% reduction in emissions. As of FY 2018, the Department was on track to meet the FY 2025 emissions' target established for emissions well in advance of the deadline. The National Climate Assessment did not include any policy recommendations or require specific actions by any Federal agency. At this time, the Department of Education is not engaged in any activities to address the potential effects of climate change.

Assistant Secretary Brogan, the Department's Office of Inspector General conducted an audit into whether the U.S. Virgin Islands has effectively designed internal controls for the administration of the Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations (RESTART) program funds. The U.S. Virgin Islands received \$13.1 million in funding. OIG found that the Virgin Islands DOE does not have the fiscal and programmatic monitoring processes in place to provide reasonable assurance that it can spend the funds in a timely manner and ensure the funds' effective use. This means schools could experience a delay in assistance to return to normal operations. What kind of technical

assistance is the Department providing to the Territories to ensure they can use the funds with fidelity for the best interest of their schools?

Response: The Department reviewed the OIG report referenced in your question. While we do not fundamentally disagree with most of the recommendations, we note that, at this time, the OIG is not auditing the Virgin Island Department of Education's (VIDE) actual implementation of its RESTART grant, but rather VIDE's structural organization and systems, and how these might impact VIDE's RESTART grant. As a result of the OIG audit, VIDE responded to the report with a description of their progress in addressing the OIG concerns.

The OIG report notes that, without effective internal controls to oversee RESTART program funds, VIDE cannot provide reasonable assurance that it will safeguard Federal program funds from fraud, waste, and abuse. The Department's requirement regarding the use of a third-party fiduciary agent represents a significant safeguard against fraud, waste, and abuse. Since 2006, there has been a third-party fiduciary agent in the Virgin Islands managing the Department's K-12 grant funds as prescribed in the annual Departmental specific grant conditions. The result of the fiduciary agent's presence and the Department's coordination with the agency has been Unqualified ("clean") single audit opinions on the Department's funds, with minimal, if any findings each year. This has been the case despite the Virgin Island government having received Qualified and Disclaimed audit opinions during the same period. We recognize that the third-party fiduciary agent should not be a long-term solution for VIDE and that it should be working toward building its capacity and internal controls.

As I mentioned in my testimony, we are improving our ability to provide timely resources, high-quality support, and appropriate oversight of education funds for natural disasters through the creation of a new Disaster Recovery Unit (DRU). The DRU is charged with coordinating Department-wide disaster-related technical assistance to grantees, including VIDE, to provide support to stakeholders affected by a disaster with a focus on restoring the learning environment. Although the office is newly assembled, it has already taken action to coordinate with internal stakeholders at the Department to deliver a consolidated approach to helping grantees understand barriers to drawing down funds and the allowability of costs. The DRU also pursues a holistic approach to disaster recovery by coordinating with other federal agencies via the Recovery Support Function Leadership Group. This approach has also served to assist VIDE in improving its quality control and performance management systems.

[Mr. Winn's response to questions submitted for the record follow:]



**Spring 2019 ELA and Mathematics Florida Standards Assessments
Hurricane Michael – Impacted Districts**

Districts Listed in SB 1610

District Number	District Name	Percentage Achievement Level 3 and Above					1-Year Percentage Point Change	Number of Days Schools Closed
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019		
English Language Arts Grades 3-10								
00	STATEWIDE	52%	52%	53%	54%	55%	1%	NA
03	BAY	53%	50%	52%	53%	57%	4%	19-28*
07	CALHOUN	57%	57%	59%	60%	61%	1%	17
19	FRANKLIN	45%	44%	42%	40%	40%	0%	10
20	GADSDEN	31%	33%	30%	34%	36%	2%	9
23	GULF	50%	50%	51%	51%	49%	-2%	8-10**
30	HOLMES	47%	46%	48%	50%	52%	2%	9
32	JACKSON	53%	52%	55%	57%	57%	0%	14
37	LEON	58%	57%	58%	58%	57%	-1%	4
39	LIBERTY	51%	48%	45%	57%	61%	4%	14
62	TAYLOR	42%	41%	42%	44%	49%	5%	4
65	WAKULLA	58%	58%	59%	62%	60%	-2%	5
67	WASHINGTON	48%	48%	49%	52%	53%	1%	10.5
All Mathematics (FSA and EOCs) Grades 3-8[†]								
00	STATEWIDE	56%	57%	59%	60%	61%	1%	NA
03	BAY	57%	57%	57%	60%	59%	-1%	19-28*
07	CALHOUN	62%	60%	60%	68%	66%	-2%	17
19	FRANKLIN	50%	44%	42%	47%	42%	-5%	10
20	GADSDEN	47%	46%	49%	48%	50%	2%	9
23	GULF	57%	63%	65%	56%	51%	-5%	8-10**
30	HOLMES	48%	50%	50%	51%	53%	2%	9
32	JACKSON	57%	56%	61%	61%	60%	-1%	14
37	LEON	61%	63%	61%	61%	62%	1%	4
39	LIBERTY	48%	51%	49%	53%	54%	1%	14
62	TAYLOR	53%	54%	49%	53%	59%	6%	4
65	WAKULLA	62%	61%	63%	64%	65%	1%	5
67	WASHINGTON	52%	58%	57%	61%	60%	-1%	10.5

*The district is listed as having partial openings from November 5-16.

**The district had two planned days off in the middle of closures that are not included in this count.

[†]Results are for FSA Mathematics, Algebra 1, and Geometry combined, as applicable.



District Number	District Name	Percentage Achievement Level 3 and Above					1-Year Percentage Point Change	Number of Days Schools Closed
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019		
Algebra 1								
00	STATEWIDE	56%	54%	60%	61%	60%	-1%	NA
03	BAY	54%	62%	64%	64%	63%	-1%	19-28*
07	CALHOUN	66%	58%	64%	62%	65%	3%	17
19	FRANKLIN	51%	41%	63%	50%	35%	-15%	10
20	GADSDEN	24%	28%	31%	32%	34%	2%	9
23	GULF	70%	66%	64%	62%	56%	-6%	8-10**
30	HOLMES	44%	44%	44%	41%	46%	5%	9
32	JACKSON	56%	53%	68%	60%	50%	-10%	14
37	LEON	67%	58%	77%	70%	68%	-2%	4
39	LIBERTY	58%	45%	60%	58%	62%	4%	14
62	TAYLOR	63%	44%	55%	46%	52%	6%	4
65	WAKULLA	65%	62%	76%	67%	58%	-9%	5
67	WASHINGTON	53%	53%	52%	54%	48%	-6%	10.5
Geometry								
00	STATEWIDE	53%	51%	53%	56%	57%	1%	NA
03	BAY	64%	56%	61%	63%	62%	-1%	19-28*
07	CALHOUN	70%	60%	51%	60%	56%	-4%	17
19	FRANKLIN	36%	40%	38%	43%	41%	-2%	10
20	GADSDEN	16%	13%	18%	19%	14%	-5%	9
23	GULF	62%	66%	68%	69%	68%	-1%	8-10**
30	HOLMES	34%	38%	41%	42%	33%	-9%	9
32	JACKSON	57%	49%	46%	58%	44%	-14%	14
37	LEON	59%	57%	61%	61%	66%	5%	4
39	LIBERTY	36%	33%	27%	54%	66%	12%	14
62	TAYLOR	53%	33%	43%	37%	4%	-33%	4
65	WAKULLA	65%	59%	74%	68%	72%	4%	5
67	WASHINGTON	34%	35%	49%	41%	49%	8%	10.5

*The district is listed as having partial openings from November 5-16.

**The district had two planned days off in the middle of closures that are not included in this count.

[Whereupon, at 11:42 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

