

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

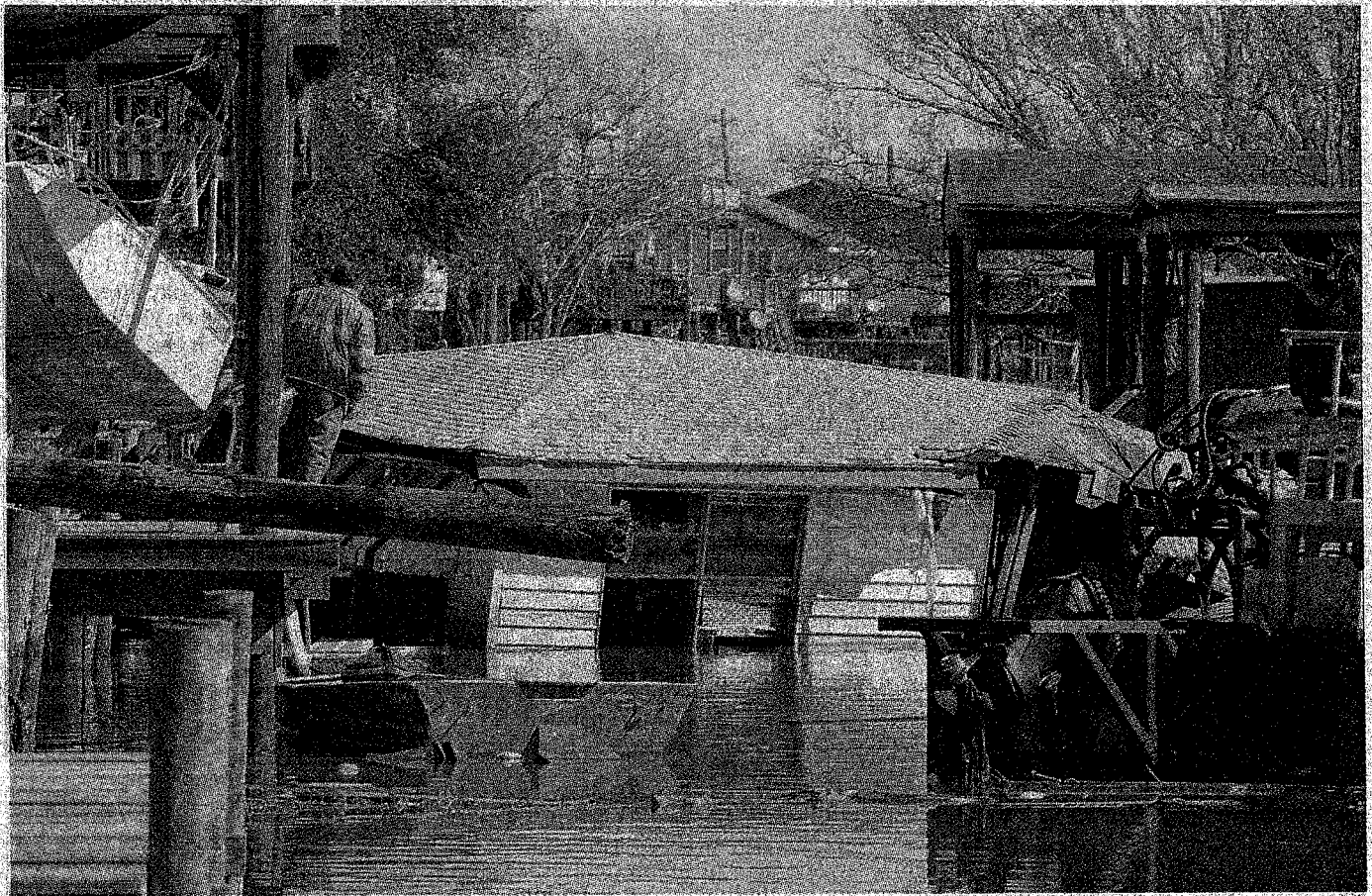
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009

★★★

VOL. 108 • NO. 119 • \$1.00

Officials will begin emptying Galveston Bay of the possessions — vehicles, furniture, even a home — the hurricane took away

## DREDGING UP IKE'S WRATH



JAMES NIELSEN : CHRONICLE

**A HOUSE SUBMERGED:** Dan Rackard, marine operations manager with CrowderGulf, examines a home sitting in San Leon canal Wednesday. The group is surveying debris Ike left in Galveston Bay.

**By MATTHEW TRESAUGUE**  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Hurricane Ike littered Galveston Bay with easy chairs, mattresses, refrigerators, motorcycles and sunken shrimp boats. They're easy

for protecting the coast, has pinpointed nearly 600 large pieces of underwater debris after surveying about one-fifth of the bay.

The sonar scans will continue through February, but the cleanup could begin as

million for the cleanup, the largest of its kind in the state's history. Officials said they expect reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"On the plus side, the bay will be cleaner than

spokesman for the General Land Office.

For years, hundreds of abandoned barges, shrimp boats and recreational vessels have cluttered the bayous, bays and shores of the Gulf of Mexico.



Impact of Hurricane Ike on Dickinson ISD  
Texas State Senate Committee on Education  
February 10, 2009

Leland Williams, Ed. D.  
Superintendent DISD  
*Physical Damage*

1. Most media attention and press focus has been on the physical destruction caused by Hurricane Ike, *and it was significant*. Our San Leon community was hit with about a 14 foot storm surge. This level of storm surge might not be significant in some areas, but in San Leon the elevation near the southeast projection of the community is at or near sea level. Much of the community is at 6 to 10 feet above sea level. The loss of property and life (3 confirmed victims) is unprecedented in the memories of current residents.
2. Dickinson ISD constructed San Leon Elementary School on 27<sup>th</sup> street, and opened it in the fall of 2007. The storm surge reached 24<sup>th</sup> street. However, when we constructed the school, we raised the site approximately six feet above natural grade—to a finished floor elevation of 18 feet. As the storm surge came ashore, the area around the Elementary School became an island, isolated from access to or from any arterial roadway.
3. The San Leon Elementary school had the most significant damage of any of our facilities, with the front entry walkway blown down and into the building. The flying metal knocked holes in the brick wall near the canopy, resulting in the need to replace about 200 square feet of brickwork. Also, the roof was lifted in that area, resulting in the loss of carpet and teaching materials in 6 classrooms.
4. Water was blown in and around windows and doors on several campuses, and several roofs showed signs of uplift, but the resulting loss was insignificant in comparison to what many of our neighboring districts encountered.
5. One gym at the high school had a portion of the roof blown off, but the interior damage did not cause the campus to miss instruction in that facility.
6. One campus had canopies and two portable buildings destroyed, and insurance will not cover that loss. We are in the process of replacing with new buildings at this time after exhausting all known resources to recover the cost or to find used facilities to purchase.
7. Several kitchens had large quantities of food products in freezers and refrigerators. With the loss of power, we lost significant quantities of those food stocks. We were able to acquire use of three large generators immediately following the storm, which we used at our central warehouse and a couple of campuses, or our food losses would have been even more significant.
8. Students missed a total of nine days of instruction, then we were back in session. The district calendar was adjusted to make up three of those days, resulting in the loss of only six

days of instruction for most students. On two campuses we were required to be out an extra day (total of ten days) because of lack of power and availability of potable drinking water on those campuses. On one of those campuses we had school for one day with the entire campus on an emergency generator, after the water system was declared safe for use. That one day of use of the generator cost in excess of \$8,500 (rental and fuel). Even though it was expensive, we would not have had access to the generator without the assistance of one of our Job Order Contractors, KBR, who made arrangements to assist us.

9. Many trees were blown down on campuses and in the community. On one campus it cost us approximately \$60,000 to remove the damaged and destroyed trees. Some of the recently planted trees had to be reset. Other damages were noted to roofs, flashing, lighting, supplies, technology infrastructure, fences, ceiling tiles, windows, gutters, downspouts, canopies, rooftop ventilators, etc., but they were relatively minor.

10. Physical damage to the communities we serve was significant:

- **San Leon lost approximately 500 homes**, either completely or significantly enough that a complete rebuild was necessary. Many are just now beginning that process.
- Other parts of the Dickinson ISD were impacted by the many twisters that spun off from the storm. One subdivision had **50 or more homes** with significant roof damage.
- It is estimated that **another 100 homes were flooded in isolated parts of the district**, some significantly.

But the psycho-social, educational, community, and financial issues may have just begun:

### *Psycho-social and educational*

These residence damages created many unsettling circumstances for our families. At San Leon Elementary school, which had approximately 600 students enrolled prior to the storm, we have had in excess of 180 students to leave and another 160 to enroll. This mobility creates significant instructional issues on that campus. And, that is just one example, because all nine of our campuses were impacted moderately or significantly in this manner. The students we gained after the storm from other districts were significantly more able to handle the level of instruction they encountered than were the Katrina evacuees of a couple of years ago.

Many of the families that lost their homes refused to leave the area and lived in flooded-out cars or in tents in their yards for several weeks. Many of these families moved in with relatives or friends in DISD or in other school districts. Some of those evacuees commuted significant distances so their children could remain enrolled in their school. One family commuted daily from Katy so their children could maintain the good relationships their children had with their teachers in Dickinson ISD.

We have had two teachers to resign their position to move from the area because of storm related issues—flooded home, lost everything, could not find suitable alternate living quarters. On one campus we have three assistant principals, and each of them had flood damage or destruction to their homes. Some of our administrators live on Galveston Island, so they were significantly impacted.

Just a week ago as we were working with one elementary student who had become difficult to manage in the classroom and on campus, we found that the family had been homeless since the storm and their living arrangements with friends were uncertain and less than desirable. Because of the family's fierce independence, they had not asked for any assistance. That was evidently building some anger and frustration in the student that was manifesting itself at school. After our principal, counselor, social worker, and behavior coach worked with the family, the student's attitude and behavior are returning to pre-storm levels. It is unknown if we have reached all in similar situations in spite of the valiant efforts of faculty and staff members.

Our crisis recovery team and individual staff members have worked tirelessly since immediately following the storm to address all needs of families, even those needs that have not normally been in the school district's domain. Our resources have been taxed as a result. We accepted donations for assistance to the families that were used to replace clothing of any family member, provided tents, blankets, and sleeping accommodations. A clothing drive and school supply drive was helpful but left many voids that have been discovered after that drive concluded.

We are advised that we may see evidence of post stress disorders for some time. We will deal with those as they are revealed. Some of our counselors and social workers may even be showing signs of stress as they continue to assist families, some even while they are dealing with their own issues at their personal residence.

### *Community*

One thing about bay-shore community residents in Galveston County is that they don't expect (or want) much from government. Some of that causes some issues for the district, but it is a fact of life for us. This area is unincorporated for the most part. The residents help each other, and did so magnificently following the storm.

However, I continue to be concerned about the lack of state and federal support to critical services such as the volunteer fire department. The San Leon Volunteer Fire Department relocated their equipment to the elementary school site prior to the arrival of the storm because of their concern that their station might be subject to flooding from the predicted storm surge. The volunteer fire fighters also stayed in the school during the storm, and used it as a base of operations during the week following the storm as they responded to search and recovery efforts as well as EMS requests. After the storm, responders from the state offices also used the school site as a base for

their operations, including the Texas Rangers, TxDOT, Parks and Wildlife, and others. The Red Cross used the school site as a point of distribution for hot meals. The Volunteer Fire Department's fire station did get over 8 feet of water in the building and their two outbuildings were demolished by wind and storm surge.

After the storm passed, another of our temporarily vacated facilities was used by Galveston County as a base of operations for the many officers who were either temporarily relocated from Galveston Island, were in the area to assist in the search and recovery efforts, or were there to fill in for local officials who had been working many long days and nights.

The county offered to assist in paying for reconstruction of the fire department building, if the fire department accepted the fact that the county would own the building and would control its use. The volunteer fire fighters who have built the service over the past 30 to 40 years were not willing to be at the mercy of a governmental body that could significantly change with an election—so they declined the offer by the county. They do have some insurance, so are going to be able to partially rebuild (will add to the facility over time as resources are available), but there should be some way for the federal and/or state government to assist these “first responders”. They are so valuable to our communities, and should not have to rely on their own fundraisers and local donations to rebuild after such a disaster. FEMA has been of no financial assistance to the department. Because of their resolve and dedication, the Volunteer fire fighters have begun the process of raising funds and securing volunteer assistance to rebuild.

There are seeds of bitterness sown when events such as this occur, resulting in further lack of trust of any governmental agency. This has a spin-off effect on schools in many ways.

Immediately after the storm, the volunteer fire department accepted the offer of a local contractor who owned some heavy equipment and had it in the area, and they started clearing the main roads so fire trucks and ambulances could travel the roads. A county deputy sheriff threatened to arrest the contractor and the fire department official if they did not cease and desist—because they were not authorized contractors—even though they had inspected the debris fields and knew there were no victims contained in that debris. And, they were not removing the debris from the area, simply getting it off the road.

I have heard several discussions complaining of the “Barney Fife” mentality of some of our local law enforcement officials following the storm, with “too many chiefs and not enough Indians”. It seems that laws would protect first responders from such conflict, with the common good being the driving force. “Turf” issues should not be of the significance that they were.

Perhaps as significant to our area as to the Island is the loss of jobs at UTMB. After several years of less-than-adequate funding, Hurricane Ike was like “the straw that

broke the camel's back". Many of the doctors and support staff members who lost jobs in the downsizing of UTMB were residents of our school district. So, not only do we lose access to world class medical facilities, but we are losing many of the strong supporters of quality instruction from the district, along with their children as they depart to find employment in other metropolitan areas. One of our administrators' husbands was among the ones losing their job. The long term impact on the area is unknown, but the feeling is traumatic at this time. It will take a long time for this hurt to heal.

### *Financial/Economic Concerns*

Over-zealous enforcement of building ordinances and requirements along with long delays in receiving building permits "add insult to injury". Some of these issues have been prevalent locally since long before the storm---since a change in local city administration and building officials. School districts pay architects and engineers to design buildings that meet codes, but the local officials sometimes take several months to review the completed plans and add their ordinance and personal interpretation requirements, some of which cost significant dollars to local taxpayers and add no value to the job as far as the district is concerned.

Previous city administrators and building officials accepted the work of architects and engineers almost on face value. This recent development is even more obvious when comparing the three incorporated entities we work with. A recent addition to one of our schools required over 4 ½ months of building official review prior to receipt of a building permit. During this time, the construction industry encountered about a 5% increase in building costs. This may have resulted partially from the load placed on that department following the storm. In another jurisdiction, a building permit on a significantly more complicated project took just a few weeks. There is such a difference in the way they do business, the most ornery process becomes draconian following a disaster. And, I have learned that several school districts are encountering increasing difficulty in this area.

The attorney general has ruled that school districts do not have to comply with landscaping ordinances, but many of the other local ordinances and interpretations of code create much more conflict. Perhaps a reasonable time restriction should be in law to keep this type of delay from derailing a project or driving up the cost to taxpayers.

The loss of many homes and several businesses in the bay-shore area will have an impact on the total taxable value of the properties in the district. Many properties may also see a declining value as a result of revaluation following Hurricane Ike. This should not impact the M&O budget of the district because of target revenue funding, but will have a significant impact on I&S tax rates. In Dickinson ISD we currently have a \$0.46 tax rate for I&S (only nine districts in Texas have a higher rate) and had a plan in place to sell an additional \$40,000,000 in bonds during calendar 2009. The



loss in value could force the district to raise the I&S tax rate, perhaps beyond the current \$0.50 tax rate cap.

Adding to the dilemma we have is the fact that we may not be able to sell the \$40,000,000 in bonds because of the \$0.50 tax rate test. If we are able to sell the bonds, the capacity of the Permanent School Fund is not likely to be able to guarantee the bonds, forcing the district to pay a significantly higher interest rate based on the Districts bond rating, or paying for insurance on the bonds.

Being a recent fast growth district, we have a unique set of circumstances of having to replace an aging infrastructure just prior to having to add significant square footage. The district has grown by 30.7% in the past five years—from 2003-04 to 2007-08. We have had to construct buildings at a per square foot cost far above the cost when the tax rate cap was set. If something is not done with the \$0.50 tax rate test and/or the EDA, or some other similar funding mechanism we may be put in a financial vise that will not allow the district to continue to address facility needs, even though bond issues have been passing with 2 to 1 and 3 to 1 votes. With a growing student population that we have no control over, that could prove to be disastrous. Several fast growth school districts are in similar circumstances.

Pre-Ike, Dickinson ISD was operating with an estimated \$5.5 million dollar deficit budget for the 2008-09 school year. Hurricane Ike will likely add \$250,000 to \$400,000 to that deficit, after all assistance we receive from insurance and FEMA. When comparing our target revenue with other districts in our area one finds significant disparity. If we were in Sheldon ISD, for example, with the same number of WADA, we would have some \$12.69 Million more to operate with. However, if we were in Cypress Fairbanks we would have about \$4.8 Million less. There is something wrong with a system that builds that ~~much~~ disparity into the funding, then locks it in, with no recognition of inflation or increasing uncontrollable costs. The district is facing significant reductions in 2009-10 without correction of these inequities by the legislature.

It should be noted that if we had been able to keep the revenue from value growth over the past three years, we would have had a balanced budget when blended over those three years. Being able to access the revenue from value growth is not *the* answer, because that does not address equity, but it would have helped in our fast-growth district.

Ike, by itself, was not a back-breaker for us. But, in conjunction with the present school finance dilemma and other circumstances, the elements of a “perfect financial storm” are now evident for many districts—including Dickinson ISD.



## Impact of Hurricane Ike on Dickinson ISD

February 10, 2009

Leland Williams, Ed. D.

Superintendent DISD

Under the funding mechanisms in HB1, inequity is made more “permanent” and more apparent. Following is a comparison of the target revenue numbers of some Region IV (Houston Region) school districts:

### per student (WADA) target revenue

◦ Cypress Fairbanks ISD	\$4,509
◦ Pasadena ISD	\$4,703
◦ Friendswood ISD	\$4,930
◦ <b>Dickinson ISD</b>	<b>\$4,959</b>
◦ Katy ISD	\$5,258
◦ La Porte ISD	\$5,304
◦ Clear Creek ISD	\$5,365
◦ Galveston ISD	\$5,651
◦ Deer Park ISD	\$5,651
◦ Texas City ISD	\$5,706
◦ Sheldon ISD	\$6,180

There is not “access to reasonably similar levels of revenue at reasonably similar tax rates”—funding level appears to be arbitrary. At the WADA level of DISD of 10,400, the difference in revenue would be:

◦ Cypress Fairbanks ISD	\$-4,880,000
◦ Pasadena ISD	\$-2,662,400
◦ Friendswood ISD	\$-301,600
◦ <b>Dickinson ISD</b>	<b>0</b>
◦ Katy ISD	\$3,109,600
◦ La Porte ISD	\$3,588,000
◦ Clear Creek ISD	\$4,222,400
◦ Galveston ISD	\$7,196,800
◦ Deer Park ISD	\$7,196,800
◦ Texas City ISD	\$7,768,800
◦ Sheldon ISD	\$12,698,400

These differences in target revenue can have a significant impact on a district’s ability to respond to natural disasters and other unforeseen situations, as well as provide quality education services.

