

Governor DeSantis (00:00):

You see, we have Manny Diaz, our commissioner of education is here. We also are joined by the principal here, Jennifer Dolciotto. And then the second grade teacher, Kelly Walker is also with us here today, is gonna be able to speak.

Governor DeSantis (00:17):

So you know, this storm, of course, you know, we still see damage. There's a lot that needs to be done. There was a lot that needed to be done immediately to help rescue, and those efforts were done not just in places like Northport and in Fort Myers Beach, but even far more inland and central Florida, and even on the east coast of Florida. So people really did a great job with that, with those initial responses. Uh, you also have situations where the services are interrupted. We worked very hard with the power restoration to have those crews there ready to go. And they went and really have done a great job, I mean even on Pine Island. You know, you saw the day after the storm, the bridge was wiped away. They thought the island was just gonna wither.

Governor DeSantis (01:02):

And they asked me for help, and we were able to, you know, get that bridge restored in three days, which people were very happy about. But that's allowed us to bring in, it's allowed us to bring in a lot of support. So you're now over, I think, 90 plus percent that's restored on Pine Island. They had really significant damage doing the same thing on Sanibel. And so those are really, really important. But when you talk about kind of core things in a community, these schools are very, very important. And I think that there was a great effort and the state, Manny Diaz has been great helping whatever they needed to do. But really, you know, you had the school districts, the administrators and the teachers work really hard to try to get kids back as soon as humanly possible. And I think that we've seen that happen in all these different counties. We had 12 schools in the southern part of Sarasota County, including Toledo Blade that were still closed when the rest of the county reopened, but today, this is the first day back here, and we have all but two schools in the entire county are back and open. And so that's, and they're gonna be open tomorrow. So that's really, really good.

Governor DeSantis (02:21):

And I was just, you know, I was, we were in Punta Gorda. We flew into Punta Gorda. We were stopping by, checking out some of the businesses, seeing how people were doing. And I had a couple moms come up to me, "Thank you for helping with the schools". You know, the parents want the kids in school. It's really important, and I know the kids are happy to be here. So that's helping just restore normalcy. And you have these things that need to be done to help restore the communities, the homes, the infrastructure, but to have this part of the community functioning so quickly is really, really great. And we know how important it is to have kids in school. We were, you know, we've helped out in Hardy County, we helped out in Collier, you know, Collier, they, you know, they got hit pretty good with the storm surge, and they did a high school football game

Governor DeSantis (03:08):

basically a week and a half after Ian hit them. They were back doing their big rivalry kids, got in school. So there's a lot of success stories. So we're really proud and we're also proud to be able to be here today for this announcement because we do different things in our budget to be able to help education. And we do it in a variety of ways. We just did a record amount of money. And, but basically when I became governor, we created two years ago a categorical spending part of the FEFP that had to go to increased

teacher salaries. And so we're able to do this year \$800 million, which no one, we've never done that much before. So we're able to do that. Covid year we were able to do thousand dollars bonuses for all teachers and principals in the entire state of Florida. One of the other things we have that can make an impact on helping schools generally, but particularly helping teachers is our school recognition program. And so today we're able to announce that we are awarding \$200 million in school recognition awards for schools that showed student growth and teaching excellence in the 2021-2022 school year.

Governor DeSantis (04:25):

And I think for those not familiar with the program, public schools must receive a grade of A or improve one letter grade from the year before. And so this is 1400 schools throughout the state of Florida that are going to get this funding and there's really been a great showing from areas that just happened to be hit by Hurricane Ian. So there'll be 24 schools in Sarasota County that will receive school recognition bonuses, including \$142,000 right here at Toledo Blade Elementary School, which is an A school.

Governor DeSantis (05:08):

27 schools in Lee County will receive a total of 3.6 million, 38 in Collier, total of 5,000,006 in Charlotte, and then I was just at Bowling Green Elementary in Hardy County, and just Bowling Green Elementary is gonna get \$54,000. And so these funds can be used in a variety of ways. You can provide bonuses to teachers and staff members. You also can use the money for equipment or other types of materials to basically help assist student performance. You can also use it to bring in some temporary personnel if you need that as well. So, you know, we trust the schools will make those good decisions. But it's really important that when you have success, that that is recognized. And that's what these awards are doing. And of course, now, given these circumstances, this award was earned by schools like Toledo Blade Elementary before Ian hit of course.

Governor DeSantis (06:06):

But now that you're dealing with what we're dealing with, you know, this may come in handy to help assist in some of those areas as well. And we really want to thank all the staff and the faculty for working hard. I mean, I've seen throughout these affected areas, you know, faculty and administrators who had major damage to their homes. I even saw some that lost their homes, and yet they're showing up to school every day trying to prepare the school for the kids to come back. So we appreciate you having that public spirit. It really means a lot. And we are also cognizant of different types of needs that different communities will have. One of the things that we've done at the state level, really thanks to the first lady, my wife, is create this Florida Disaster Fund, and she's really led the effort, it's now raised over 4\$5 million.

Governor DeSantis (06:56):

and that can be used to assist with things that maybe the state programs or the FEMA or local maybe, maybe those aren't fitting your needs because there's certain things you're eligible for, certain things you may not be eligible for. You know, there's certain things with insurance policies. Maybe you get, maybe you don't. So there's gonna be needs beyond just kind of those wickets. And so we've already done \$2 million to some of the first responder organizations like the Sheriff's Association, PBA Firefighters, and they're raising money to match that. And that money can be used to help their folks who may have difficulties, and maybe they need some help with some home repairs. Maybe they need temporary place to live. Now you are eligible for that with FEMA now. But, still there's a lot of needs. And I've asked the Department of Education to talk with the different school districts in the affected

areas to see how can we use the Florida Disaster Fund to help some of the teachers that may need assistance

Governor DeSantis ([07:59](#)):

because we understand, you know, you expect to see a police officer on the street, you expect to see teachers in school, but you don't think about, well, they may be here when they have all the same problems you have with their homes, and yet they're here helping our kids, or the case of law enforcement. They're out keeping things in good order. And so, we recognize though that there's, you're not immune just cuz you have an important public function, you serve in your job, you're not immune from having had major effects from this storm. So we're gonna be working on that and hopefully be able to roll something out very soon with those awards from that fund to help charitable groups that are gonna be focused on folks who are involved in education. And if you want to contribute, you can go to Floridadisasterfund.org.

Governor DeSantis ([08:44](#)):

Floridadisasterfund.org. Can also text disaster to 2 0 2 2 2. There was also, because we're in Sarasota County, you can buy a Turvis Tumbler, where the company has said all proceeds will go to the disaster fund. So it's a, Together We Shine Tumbler, I think it's, I've heard good reviews about it. My wife was involved with launching it. So if you're so inclined, that's another way to not only help the local folks here, but to help the disaster fund. So I'm just glad that we're able to bring these awards here to Toledo Blade Elementary. I'm glad that Sarasota performed well again for, really it's come to be expected. And the same thing with some of our other counties that got hit hard. This obviously isn't gonna make up for that, but it sure is nice to have a little extra support. So, I want to thank the principal, and I want to thank everyone at this school for having us here. So the floor is yours. Thank you.

Principal Dolciotto ([09:47](#)):

Well, thank you Governor DeSantis. Today is actually a very special day. It is not often that the Governor and the Commissioner of Education visits your school to celebrate and recognize your accomplishments. So as the principal, I am humbled and quite honored to be here on behalf of my staff to accept this recognition. I am incredibly proud of the focus, dedication, and passion that our students and staff bring to this campus every single day. Today is also a very special day, as you heard. It is the first day that we were able to welcome our students back to our campus after the hurricane relief efforts. We enjoyed seeing their smiling faces this morning. Lots of hugs, and we certainly look forward to returning to a little normalcy after today. I would like to take just a quick moment though to recognize everyone who was very helpful in the outpouring of support and getting our community ready for us to return back to school. I'd like to say thank you to our superintendents, our district leadership, our first responders, emergency response teams, community foundations, and many other agencies who helped pave the way for our road to recovery right now. So a big round of applause for them. Thank you.

Principal Dolciotto ([11:03](#)):

And as we move forward, the use of these school recognition dollars will certainly be impactful as we prioritize high quality learning experiences for all of our students. Staff will be able to use these dollars in a very personalized and individualized manner to support their needs as well as the needs of their students. And keep in mind that the expectations for our district, for excellence across the county remain high. And we are committed to working together as a professional learning community and

staying focused, working together as one for the success of all. So thank you Governor DeSantis and commissioner for this reward and this recognition. I thank you for being here.

Kelly Walker ([11:54](#)):

Hi everyone. It's a little different. I'm used to seven year olds in front of me, so brace yourselves with me. I was asked to share for a minute or two about my story with teaching, so that's what I'm gonna do. I wrote this down. I'm trying not to look at it, but I probably will. So, my name is Kelly Walker and obviously I was asked to speak a little bit about my teaching journey. So here I am. I was born and raised in Michigan, and I moved to Florida about 15 years ago. I knew I wanted to be a teacher ever since I was a little girl, when I was putting my little stuffed animals out and, you know, giving them those little fake assessments, those little fake tasks. I've been in the classroom for 15 years and have been at Toledo Blade for 12 years.

Kelly Walker ([12:38](#)):

When I moved from Michigan, I knew I had to check out the schools. I wasn't familiar with them. And I came here to Sarasota County School District. When I came to Toledo Blade as a sub, I instantly knew that this is where I belonged. I can remember when Mr. Runoff was the principal here at this school, and Mrs. Dociotto was the vice principal at this school. And at that time, they were greeting families, they were outside walking around the campus, interacting with the kids and held the staff to high standards. And I was like, this is it. This is where I need to be. So I have taught a lot of different grades from high school to third grade to kindergarten, and we have to give those kindergarten teachers props because woo, I never wanna do that again. Never wanna do that again. Currently I am in second grade teaching and I love it.

Kelly Walker ([13:26](#)):

It's where my heart is. It's truly my passion. I enjoy every minute of that. You could be having the worst day in the world, which I have had some days like that. And you come in and you see their faces and it changes everything They brighten your day. It is just like I said, you could have the worst day and they just make it the best. They've been through so much from Covid to now Hurricane Ian, you know, being the big disaster in our area. I've had students who've had to uproot and move to a different state because they've lost everything. We have staff members who have lost everything. And today to see them come into the school ready to learn, excited, smiling, giving you hugs, it just changed everything for us. So I see some teachers nodding their heads, Yes, it's awesome.

Kelly Walker ([14:13](#)):

Our job is at times, or I'm sorry, the bond we make with the kids, it can't be replaced. So this is why we do it as teachers. You make this connection with them and it's truly amazing. It's hard and it's challenging, and it's stressful as a teacher, as most of my fellow colleagues will say. But this is what sets our district and our school apart from others. We all pull together in Sarasota County. We collaborate. We use many resources as we can to help these kids make growth. It's extremely fulfilling and it's a huge accomplishment as a staff member to earn these A plus funds. Thank you. From all the sweat, tears, time and our own money being spent in the classroom as well, our staff and our admin, and most importantly, the students are earning this incentive that is great to be recognized and to be able to take these funds and reinvest it into the students to help their education soar is truly amazing and I'm really honored on behalf of Toledo Blade.

Commissioner Manny Diaz ([15:19](#)):

So great to be here at Toledo Blade today. We've been looking forward to this moment, and I'm happy to report, as the governor said, that all five districts that were affected by Hurricane Ian are back open and we're looking to have all the schools open the rest of the week. So I'd like to thank the governor for his leadership, not only in the preparation for the storm, but in the recovery of the storm, and understanding that our schools are such a vital part of that recovery. I'd like to thank the staff here in Sarasota and here at Toledo Blade, especially all the teachers that we have here in the audience. Without you, it doesn't happen. So it's so important to be here today. But I tell you this, Governor DeSantis understands that the most important thing in our schools is the teachers in front of our students.

Commissioner Manny Diaz ([15:58](#)):

And his investment, his leadership in investing over \$2 billion the last three years directly to teachers is a sign of that. And understanding how important to have our schools open, our kids learning and trying to get back to normalcy. And of course, we have to highlight the school recognition funds. And congratulations to Toledo Blade for the work you did in getting an A and those funds are coming to you. It's so important to recognize the hard work of our teachers, to have our kids back in school, to have our community feeling like it's on the road to recovery. So thank you very much. Congratulations to all you. It's great to be here today.

Governor DeSantis ([16:34](#)):

And we really appreciate the great effort. We've, you know, we're gonna do a lot more, continue the momentum that we've gotten with respect to education. You know, if you look at the most recent map state by state, we were number one in the country. First grade reading, fourth grade reading, fourth grade math. When you adjust for demographics, the state by state again is gonna come out for this year. When is that coming out? Next week? 24th. Yeah, 24th. And, you know, we had the kids in school, a lot of places people didn't. So, you know, I think we're gonna end up showing what we've done, big investments in early learning and early literacy. And I think that those, those have been done. We have more initiatives that I would've announced by now if it weren't for this doggone hurricane putting everything off the calendar. But stay tuned because we're gonna do more in the realm of teacher support. We're gonna do more in the realm of workforce education and we'll do more in the realm of, things like early literacy because it really is important. So thanks everyone for their hard work. Thanks for getting the kids back to school, and hopefully, you know, we don't miss a beat and get everybody back to where they need to be. So God bless and thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([17:48](#)):

Okay. Any questions? Yes.

Question 1 ([17:52](#)):

Um, do more for, uh, <inaudible>, uh, regard to how the funds reallocate. You mentioned a personalized individualized approach. Uh, do you have sort of a free set program or it's kind of just the, um, more, uh, teachers in directly interacting with administrators, seeing how, uh, it can be descriptive?

Principal Dolciotto ([18:12](#)):

Actually, our school will follow the protocol that Step Forth, which is our school advisory council in conjunction with our staff will make a determination on how those funds will be spent. And again, they

can be spent, um, to support the individual efforts of teachers to support our students and our overall school growth. Thanks.

Governor DeSantis ([18:31](#)):

All right. We'll be back soon. You guys need anything else? Yes, sir.

Question 2 ([18:35](#)):

Uh, Governor, I'm from Owen Englewood area. Okay. Uh, the western side of Charlotte and Sara County. We're concerned over there that majority of the residents of Englewood do not have any internet at yet. Okay.

Governor DeSantis ([18:49](#)):

Who's your provider?

Question 2 ([18:51](#)):

Uh, Comcast is and Expend is Baker's provider and

Governor DeSantis ([18:54](#)):

Comcast is

Question 2 ([18:55](#)):

Comcast expend expense, Comcast, whatever they wanna go by today. Um, but, uh, they're very slow and I heard this morning from somebody who had made contact with him that it may be the end of the month or next month before we have.

Governor DeSantis ([19:12](#)):

Yikes. Okay. Um, can we get our star link and see what we have for starlink in Inglewood? So basically, you know, when this happened, there was predictable outages and power, some of communications, but, you know, the electricity came on quicker than than we've ever had you know, in a hurricane, a lot of the, some of the phones did, you know, did okay. I mean, they had some hits and starts, but the one thing I keep hearing is particularly in Charlotte County with some of the internet. So one of the things we did to bridge that gap is we got 450 starlink internet devices from Elon Musk and those satellites will beam down. You just put it out and, you know, not if you did it, everyone here would be able to get it in this room or even maybe in the school.

Governor DeSantis ([20:02](#)):

Uh, but you need to put a bunch in the community. But that's something that we're willing to do to try to bridge the gap. I mean, I know that there's been, it seems like it's been slow with some of these companies getting the internet back and this one, you don't need to worry about the cables. The only, if you have the thing, you plug in the device and then your devices can get it right off, right off Musk's thing because it's coming from his satellite. So I think that's a great way. So we will be in touch with the county. Uh, and is that, is Northport does have internet or how's it here? Spotty. Spotty, Okay. Do you guys need anything at the school? How's your internet here? Do you need a Elon Musk device? Our

Speaker 6 ([20:41](#)):

Well, I would defer it.

Governor DeSantis (20:47):

Do you need it or do you just want it? If I see it in your backyard somewhere, I'm gonna be like, Okay. Because honestly, it's very clear. I mean, it's amazing. We, when we first got 'em that maybe few days after the storm we're in Hardy County and we were streaming, our Press conference. And we usually do that anyways. And it's always a little spotty if you're in, you know, some of the more rural areas. This was crystal clear. I mean, it really was good. Whether you're urban or rural with this, it doesn't matter as long as you have that device. You know, that's something. In the meantime, I know that there are these Elon Musk devices at some of the, the areas in each county. So if you go, for example, these DRCs, the Disaster Recovery Centers, they have the most stuff there. So like, if there's communications you need to do, you can, you can go get that, use it all you want. And there obviously for convenience, people want to be able to have it in their home. And so, uh, we will, um, we'll work with your county and if we can provide additional support, we will. Yes, sir. All

Question 2 (21:49):

Right. Governor, one last question, uh, regarding Starlink. Uh, these are, uh, already paid for by contract or, uh, Tesla AI free. Yeah. He gave Tesla free. Yeah. So

Governor DeSantis (22:00):

It's, uh,

Question 2 (22:04):

Pick with his, uh, involvement in Ukraine. Are you certain that, uh,

Governor DeSantis (22:09):

I think he's had a hiccup. I mean, I think what's happened, so I think most of you know, when the Russia, Ukraine, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Elon Musk positioned his satellites over Ukraine and gave them these things. So they've actually been using his devices to be able, uh, to defend their country. And, um, I guess some of the people in the, in the government were attacking Musk. And I'm just thinking to myself like, he's doing this for free. Don't bite the hand that feeds you. Good lord. I mean, have a little bit. So, but I think there was like kind of that curve, Fluffle, but I think he's, I think he, but he is provided that for them for free. And if you think about it in a country that big, given what's going on, I mean that's, that's tens of millions of dollars, uh, that he's effectively donated.

Governor DeSantis (22:54):

And so we, and the thing is with this, you know, we didn't have to ask him. Uh, he basically said he was gonna send, send relief. And so, so we appreciate that and, and we appreciate so many others who have been involved and, and been helping the effort. Uh, we've got some of the greatest organizations that have been down here helping folks. And really from day one, I mean, it was almost like, you know, you had to try to pry people away from here cuz so many people wanted to come help. So it was really, you've seen a lot of generosity of spirit and you've seen a lot of people step up, uh, to help their, their, their fellow Floridian or even just their fellow American. And I've even, I know people from foreign countries have wanted to help just because that's just kind of the nature of it. So, uh, thanks to everybody who's been in that effort. And, um, we'll, uh, I'm gonna, I'm gonna talk about the, uh, the internet for you guys. Thanks.

