

Governor DeSantis (00:00):

So it would've been a situation where if that would've gone the correct way, I would've done everything in my power to expedite that process forward. Nevertheless, we are where we are today, but it is disappointing nonetheless. Now, from that tragedy to a different type of obstacle and tragedy, we've had to deal with in southwest Florida. You guys have been living it, of course, I've been down here with you living it. And there's a lot that happens when you have a storm of this magnitude. Of course, you have loss of life which is tragic. You have massive destruction of property. People have lost their entire homes and all their belongings in this storm surge and in the winds of this storm there's a lot that has been done with search and rescue, with helping people with food and water, probably a record setting, power restoration in terms of what we were able to do with all those linemen ready working to get we sent contractors down to help get the water flowing again here be guys from MIT coming down to Lee County to help out.

Governor DeSantis (01:04):

So there's a whole bunch of things that kind of go into it, but I think that bouncing back and yes, we fix the bridge in Pine Island and Santa be, we're doing all that,

Governor DeSantis (01:19):

And we'll continue to do, and there's a lot that needs to be done. And I think the bounce back and the resiliency that you've seen in southwest Florida has been a different level than what we've seen in other storms across the country. And that bodes well. I think for this community's come back, which is underway, and we're working as hard as we can to do everything from the state's perspective that we can do. But you know you're never going to be kind of back to normal until we have the kids in the schools. And it's really important that be done. Obviously, that's got to be done safely. You know that there were schools that were destroyed here in Lee County, others that were damaged. We're not going to send kids back in an unsafe environment. But I know just as a parent of young kids that them being in school is important.

Governor DeSantis (02:06):

And we trust that these schools are doing a good job for the kids. And I know a lot of parents, I've spoken to parents in the shelters, and that was the one thing that they were saying very early on. We just gotta get the kids in school soon as possible. So this is not an easy thing to do, especially when you have this many, this much damage. And don't forget, you know, you have school personnel, teachers, administrators, who also suffered personal damage, and yet a lot of them have been working to try to get the schools where we need to be to have them back open. So, you know, I'm happy to be able to say that all school districts, uh, will be open no later than Tuesday, October 18th in the state of Florida. Most of the districts that had impacts have already opened.

Governor DeSantis (02:51):

We were in Hardy County yesterday. Of course, we were in Collier last week. Then here in Lee, they've really had the toughest job. But they've worked so hard to be able to get to the point where the kids can be back in school. So, the sacrifices that have been made by the parents, by teachers, by administrators have been really, really significant. It's going to make a difference. I mean, you get these situations and if it settles into a rut of kind of despair it sometimes it's harder to get that genie back in the bottle here, been knocked down. Everyone's worked really hard to get people back up on their feet, including our

students. And I think this is really, really a big effort. And the superintendent is going to talk about exactly what they're doing.

Governor DeSantis ([03:37](#)):

But I would just say this is not an easy thing to do. I think in other parts of this country, if you had something of the magnitude that happened here these kids could have been out of school for the rest of the entire semester. And that's just the reality. And so here there is work from people who have a lot of things going on in their own personal life with everything, and yet still stepping up to the plate to help. So we really appreciate it. And I can tell you from the very beginning, our view on the response was, we need all of our agencies engaged in this. And so, yeah, you build a bridge in three days because we had our agencies ready to go on that. Well, we also had the Department of Education ready to go, to offer support in any way they can.

Governor DeSantis ([04:19](#)):

So here in Lee County, under Secretary Diaz's leadership they have worked directly with the utility companies to prioritize the power restoration to the schools. They worked with the Department of Emergency Management to bring generators to the schools where those were necessary. They worked with our Department of Management service to provide Elon Musk, Starlike starlink Internet for the schools. I mean, some of this internet isn't connected yet with some of the cable companies. So, you have that starlink that could be the difference on being able to do everything. Department of Education's also facilitated the movement of portable classrooms and classroom supplies. And of course, our Department of Transportation has helped clear debris from bus stops, bus routes, and from campuses. And of course, they've done a lot more. So, it's been a real team effort. And the staff here in Lee County has been really phenomenal.

Governor DeSantis ([05:13](#)):

And you've also had people from other school districts coming into Lee and Charlotte and some of these other counties to help. I know we had folks from Bay, Broward, Hillsboro, Miami, Dade, Ocala, Pinellas, Polk. I know we had Mike Grego, former superintendent of Pinellas, was here helping working with the superintendent's team to help make this happen. So, there's a lot that's left to be done. But this is a really great sign that we're going to do it. And I think that, you know, they're going to have like football and part of the county maybe soon and all this other stuff. I'll tell you, I was in Naples last Friday night at their game. And it was a big deal, though. They did not. They got damaged, not as much as Lee County did. But, to see everybody out there, I mean, it really lifted a lot of people's spirits. And I think being the kids in school, it's going to give everybody a nice lift. And it's obviously important for their education. So, I'm happy to be able to be here to share in this announcement and we'll hear from some of the folks who help make that happen. So, Manny, you want to come up, sir?

Manny ([06:12](#)):

Thank you, Governor. And I just want to tell you Governor DeSantis leadership made all this possible when he mentions having all the agencies work together and empowering us as agency heads. This doesn't happen without that. The cooperation that we've had from emergency management, from all the other agencies to be able to get generators to some of these districts, to open the office to star link, to bring and marshal the resources from other districts. As the governor mentioned, we had facilities crews coming in from as far as Miami Dade to help get some of the schools here and Lee ready. And from day one, I mean two days after the hurricane, I came over and visited with the superintendent. We

took an aerial tour and we looked at each other. We said, He's got to start from scratch. Cause where do you start to get this going? But the governor has made it a point, it is important that we get our kids back in school, not only because of the learning, because that's how you get the community back, the mental health issues, getting the athletics and activities back to get our communities back to normal, to allow our parents to be able to do the things they need to do to get the community back to normal.

Manny ([07:13](#)):

So I want to thank you for your effort, Superintendent. We have been on the phone daily. We've had our leadership teams basically embedded on the phone. We feel like we're part of his staff, making sure that he has everything he needs. And I gotta tell you that every update that we get from him always has progress. Every day, an inch, a yard, a mile, whatever it is he's been pushing forward for this community for your kids. So again, I want to thank you for your leadership and your team that has done an incredible job. I am really thankful of the teachers in Lee County and all these districts that have been affected, but especially here, that we're here today. Because without them you can't get these schools open without the cafeteria workers and the rest of the staff. Incredible work. Thank you. And again, I want to thank Governor DeSantis for his leadership with this hurricane. Not only across the board, but specifically with schools. He charged us with getting schools open and getting kids back immediately so we can get them back into their routine and get our communities built back. So thank you very much, governor. Thank you, superintendent. And it's great to be here and see this news

Governor DeSantis ([08:15](#)):

Superintendent.

Superintendent ([08:22](#)):

Well, thank you to the governor and Commissioner Diez. I stand here today because of their help and support. I also have members of my team here today, including a new chief operations officer who I brought in from out of state to help us with this rebuild. I can't thank this team standing behind me enough. They have been on my right hand and left hand. They've been available by phone 24 hours a day. And without the help and support of both the commissioner and the governor, this would not have been possible today. You know, just a week ago I was standing in front of all of you at a press conference telling you and asking you for your patience that I needed one more week. And I had a goal of reopening schools starting on Monday. I am so proud of the staff that's here today.

Superintendent ([09:01](#)):

I know that we've all been disproportionately impacted by this storm, but you prioritize the children you work with and you prioritize these young people in their education. And from a superintendent from the bottom of my heart to all of you, thank for you for presence today. Thank you for the reunification meetings that you're going to have tomorrow with your families and your children. And thank you for your efforts that you'll start to deliver again on Monday. You are representative of an entire district, and my heart goes out to each and every one of you in a big thank you to each of you. You know, I asked for a little bit of patience because I asked, I needed to build some infrastructure. And the governor and Commissioner Diaz provided that to me. One by one, our schools came on. I'm even happy to report that Pine Island has power today.

Superintendent ([09:49](#)):

Pine Island's one of those little blessings we have, right? Pine Island shouldn't be there, and yet it is. And we're so excited that our staff's going to be able to return there very, very soon. So as our infrastructure improved, we knew we could go ahead and continue to move forward. So we developed nine criteria. I've probably mentioned those to you at this point. But one of the biggest things we're waiting on right now are some air quality results. We have 68 lab results into the lab as soon as those labs clear, then we have the green light on our safety checklist to open those schools. We have, I heard it referred to as the Lucky 13. Today we have the Lucky 13 that'll be opening on Monday as of nine o'clock this morning. We had another 11 that will be notified today that they can reopen on Tuesday.

Superintendent ([10:33](#)):

That number's only going to go up. That number again as those other lab tests, at least 38, that we expect to have by the end of the day on Friday. That'll green light another 38 schools for Wednesday. And we will continue the rollout and we will get our kids back to school. For those of you concerned about TTAs and Sanabel and Fort Myers Beach, we will be building temporary campuses. We have some commitments as early as October 31st to try to get those buildings up so that we no longer have to partner those schools with another fellow elementary school and give them a place of their own. But we are committed to keeping that community of learners together. We want those kids to go back to have that help and support that these gentlemen talked about, both with their families and with their family. That is their school family, their classmates, their teacher, and their principal.

Superintendent ([11:19](#)):

I can't thank my team enough. I know my chief of staff is here somewhere. I want to mention him by name. Michael Ramirez has been my right and left hand here on the ground. He's been absolutely amazing, and we could not be doing this work without him. He announced to the team very early on that his role was to be the driver. And he has driven, he has driven this ship and really done a great job. Also thankful to my school board members who are in attendance today. Cause we can't do this without all of you. I would share this in closing, that we are so excited to be back. We had such a great opening to school this year. We are on such the right track. Our athletes are competing not just in football, but in volleyball. As early as today, our cross country athletes are running, and training district championships are coming state champions. We're not going to let them lose out on those opportunities. We are going to make sure our kids have full and rich experience that they deserve. But let me end with this, this community is strong and I'm new

Speaker 4 ([12:13](#)):

<laugh>

Superintendent ([12:16](#)):

But I can't be in a better place. Southwest Florida and specifically Lee County is generational in its support. You went to North, your father went to north, your children go to North. Somebody always tells me they're part of the green wave, All right? But this community's strong. And we will rebuild. We will recover and we will take back what Ian tried to take from us. We're going to be better, stronger together. Thank you for your help and support as we work on this problem.

Governor DeSantis ([12:52](#)):

One who wants to first <laugh>.

Speaker 6 ([12:54](#)):

Thanks a lot, Corey. I was just asked to speak on behalf of our students and I know that everyone is looking forward to being back to some normalcy and routine, especially, our special education students, they really thrive to understand being every day, knowing what they're doing, waking up in the mornings, having their teachers, seeing those familiar faces. And I know our family came on Tuesday to help clean up with a lot of the staff here. And it was just so refreshing for my girls to be like, I saw so and so my teachers there, Miss Furlbouse said hi, who's also mowing the lawn, blowing the leaves off the roof. We have an amazing principal that leads us all, and I know we're all very excited to be on that Lucky 13 list and start back on Monday. So, great.

Governor DeSantis ([13:42](#)):

Thank you.

Speaker 8 ([13:47](#)):

First all, I would like to thank Governor DeSantis for his push for getting our schools back open. Dr. Beier, wow, first year coming in and being a superintendent. Nothing like running on with his feet on the ground coming in. My teachers, my staff, you guys are phenomenal. They are so resilient and seeing our kids on Tuesday come up and are already dealing with such severe damage to their homes, to their businesses. But they made it a priority here in elementary school. And our parents and our staff have embraced that. Reagan did a little talk on the news for us on Tuesday, and she did phenomenal. What she said is, we need to be back in school. We need the knowledge, but we also need to be here for our friends and that social emotional piece. And our teachers have worked so hard through Covid to provide that social most emotional piece. You guys are like experts on it. So when our kids come Monday, there's no doubt in my mind that our teachers are going to embrace our children and make it the best possible return for them so that we can continue this year as normal as possible. So thank you from the bottom of my heart to my staff. You guys are amazing. So thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([15:14](#)):

Thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([15:20](#)):

Well, thanks so much for everybody that's been involved. I know it's not an easy thing, you know, getting ready for just a normal school year is a lot of work. And then to be here in October and have to kind of do it all again and then some. It really takes a lot of effort. It takes a lot of dedication. And I think you're seeing that here in Lee County and the other counties, but particularly here in Lee County, where the obstacles are a lot taller. But you're surmounting those and I know these kids are going to be very thankful that is being done on their behalf. And so we'll be here to help out. I told Manny, you know, we want to be engaged and continuing to help with all the stuff that that's going on. And there's ways we can be not just at the Department of Education, but also the division of emergency management. I mean, I have our director, Kevin Guthrie, living down here for the foreseeable future to make sure that, that we're as responsive as possible to the needs that arise. So, thanks everybody. We really appreciate that. And I will take a couple questions if anyone's got any. Yes.

Speaker 9 ([16:32](#)):

You have a process in place, Chromebooks,

Speaker 10 ([16:36](#)):

The process in place will be for the students to come to school. We'll make that assessment of our students' needs and what they need. We are in the process of procuring Chromebooks. We already have some, we're already collecting all of our hotspots

Superintendent ([16:47](#)):

Back from particular high schools to also help with internet coverage as well.

Speaker 11 ([16:52](#)):

This morning you signed the executive order, expanding voting because a lot of people have been displaced, possibly voting places were damaged. Are you worried about people being disenfranchised come next month and to expand a little about the thought process?

Governor DeSantis ([17:05](#)):

Well, we had people on the ground looking at all these precincts of these affected counties. And there were a number of precincts here in Lee County that just got knocked out. So, the question is okay, what do you do with that? So, the supervisor here had submitted a request. We also had requests in Charlotte and particularly the southern part of Sarasota for some accommodations. Now, under our current law, there is a mechanism without an executive order where if you did have an interruption at one precinct, a supervisor can do that on their own. I think Lee County in particular requires more than what the typical statute allows. And so that's what we're doing. We're modeling it very similar off what was done in Bay County after Hurricane Michael, and basically there's a couple things I think are important. They're going to be able to set up super sites for people to go vote.

Governor DeSantis ([17:56](#)):

So, if your precinct was destroyed, you have this super site, they're also going to have additional days for early voting. So, people could vote the Sunday and Monday before election day. I know some people like waiting until the election day, but nevertheless, you have that option. And then the other thing is you will be able to have a absentee ballot sent to a different address. Now you have to call, you have to give them the last four of your social or email, or you got to prove who you are. It's not just ballots in the ether, but if your home got destroyed and you're staying with your in-law laws, then you can have them send that ballot to your in-laws. And so those are, I think reasonable accommodations that ensures that everybody has an opportunity to participate in this November's election. And we worked, but that was really a bottom up thing. The rest of the supervisors outside those three counties were reported to Florida. Basically. We've got it covered, but we probably won't have to change anything. If we do, it'll be minor tweaks that we can do with existing law. If there's other things that come up in this short term supervisor knows, they can contact the secretary of state cord. Bird cord Bird has been down here.

Governor DeSantis ([19:21](#)):

He's been down here looking at all this, and I think he's done a really good job identifying where some of the hiccups may be and providing relief so that, everyone has access.

Question ([19:35](#)):

I have a question for the Superintendent. For the

Governor DeSantis ([19:36](#)):

Superintendent. Sure.

Speaker 12 ([19:37](#)):

Regarding transportation to schools, how are bus driver numbers looking?

Superintendent ([19:43](#)):

We'll have an update on our bus driver's numbers on Friday. Our staff has been reaching out over the last two days. All bus drivers are expected to report to work on Monday, but so far the response has been good. But I don't have an actual percentage for you this time.

Governor DeSantis ([19:56](#)):

All right. Thanks guys. Good luck with everything.

Speaker 13 ([20:13](#)):

Good job.