

Governor DeSantis (00:03):

All right. Well, good morning. Thank you for joining me at San Carlos Park Elementary School in Lee County. I'm joined with the senior Chancellor with the former Florida Department of Education, Jacob Oliva. I wanna thank everybody at DOE for what they've been able to do. We appreciate being here at San Carlos Park Elementary School. As you know, Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Sarasota, Desoto and Heart of DeSoto and Hardee Counties. They all have kids in school. This was, these were areas that were affected very significantly. Of course, by Hurricane Ian. There were a lot of staff and teachers that were affected by this. And yet there has been a really a monumental effort to make sure kids could be back in school. And we've seen really remarkable efforts. And I think right here is a great example of that.

Governor DeSantis (00:58):

You know, some schools in Lee County had extensive damage. They just could not reopen. And so this school here shows how the community responds when you have those types of roadblocks. So, San Carlos Park had space at the school to take on additional staff and students. So it is currently serving as the host school for students from Sanibel Elementary and Fort Myers Beach Elementary. While their schools are being rebuilt. San Carlos Park Elementary normally has about 660 students and 62 teachers. Right now, they have about a thousand students with about a hundred teachers. And so this is a really been a monumental undertaking. Really grateful that San Carlos Park Elementary stepped up to help our kids stay in school. And, they have apparently, you know, there's so many kids here now, the first lunch period's at 10:00 AM so people get a early lunch, but they just have to accommodate everybody.

Governor DeSantis (02:00):

And so the county expects that these schools will continue to be merged over the next month or two. And I know they're working on other solutions besides this, but this is really important. And it's a symbol of the resiliency of the community. It's a symbol of bouncing back. I mean, when you have things like, obviously the great search and rescue that was done helped a lot of people, really rapid power restoration that was quicker than we've had on any major hurricane in Florida history. And then to have the bridges repaired and let people be going back to Pine Island like we did in three days. And like we were fortunate to be able to do in Sanibel this week where that three weeks after the storm, that Causeway was reopened for civilian traffic. And then to see the schools back even with student bodies whose schools no longer exist in their previous form.

Governor DeSantis (02:56):

It just shows that people are unifying and really working hard to get back on the feed. And I think there's been great efforts. There's a lot more that needs to be done, and part of that is why we're here today. But it will be done and we'll make it happen. We'll all work together. We'll continue to do it. So we had, and I was able to visit briefly, with some of the faculty and staff who, of the Lee County schools who had been displaced because of Hurricane Ian And I ran into teachers, really within a few days of the storm that were already working to get the kids back in school. And some of them didn't even have their own house, left, and yet they're worried about other people's kids getting them back.

Governor DeSantis (03:42):

So we had a lot of great efforts, and we understand that's not easy. We also understand that there's gonna be different needs, that are not necessarily gonna be covered by whatever FEMA could offer or the State of Florida's programs or insurance payments. And so one of the reasons we did the Florida Disaster Fund, was to be able to meet some of those needs. And the First Lady's, has really led on this.

It's raised, I think like over 47 million now. And there's so many people that want to be a part of it. Companies, organizations, you name it, to be able to do so. There's been a lot that's been awarded now, but there's way more to be awarded and there's still money coming in. And so today, one of the things that we wanted to do was to recognize what the teachers and what the staff have been through, and understanding how important it is for what they're doing for the kids.

Governor DeSantis (04:40):

We want to be able to be helpful for their own personal lives, for things that they may need, during these trying times. So today I'm excited to announce that the Florida Disaster Fund will be awarding \$2 million, to help, these teachers get back on their feet. And the funding is gonna be awarded through local education foundations, which are charitable groups in the six hardest hit counties. So Lee County Education Foundation receive 500,000, Charlotte and Sarasota, and Collier will leave 350,000. DeSoto and Hardee will each receive 225,000. These donations will help each district's teachers, particularly those who were displaced. And there's different needs right now. There's needs of, of course, home repair. There's needs of temporary shelter, there's needs of reliable transportation. I mean, you know, you had areas that flooded that didn't used to flood, and a lot of people lost vehicles.

Governor DeSantis (05:41):

So there's a whole host of things that need to be done. So this'll provide some help in that regard. And we look forward to being able to do more for our educators in the days and weeks to come. This is, we're now, I think, going to be probably, I think the First Lady will end up getting us over \$50 million very soon in that fund for total raise. With today's award, that's over \$7 million that's been awarded. First Lady's gonna make some announcements of some additional awards. So it's been a rapid turnaround. Obviously these have to be credible charities and you got to vet to make sure the money's actually going where it is. But she's been working with different corporate partners who can help assist some of the things that we're doing with respect to rebuilding and a whole host of other things.

Governor DeSantis (06:34):

And so, all in all, I think that there's been a great effort. I think there's been a lot of great people working on this stuff. And we're happy to be able to do, We did something similar than we're doing today with the police and fire. Cause you had the same thing. You had them out there immediately doing search and rescue of people, but then their homes may have had significant damage. Some totally lost their homes. And so we did a \$2 million award for the charitable arms of Police, Sheriff's Association, PBA and the Firefighters Association. And so we're now doing here with our teachers. And we think that this is something that's very important. So I'm happy to be able to be here. I really appreciate what they're doing at San Carlos Park Elementary School. It's really inspiring to see the students seem very happy. I know they miss being in school when it gets interrupted. So great job for everybody involved, and we'll hear from some of our speakers. And so, first Senior Chancellor, Jacob Oliva with the Florida Department of Education.

Jacob Oliva (07:42):

Thank you. And thank you Governor DeSantis for such a wonderful initiative. I can tell you our agency's been committed to supporting schools and making sure that we get students back into the classrooms in front of their teachers and where their friends, because that's where we know that learning happens the best. And we've been on the phone with school districts each and every single day. And I can tell you governor firsthand, because of your leadership, I hear every day from superintendents and school

leaders that the communication and support they've received and navigating through this hurricane has been truly superior before, during, and after the storm. And we really want to applaud and thank you for making sure we're doing what we're doing to remove those obstacles. So, thank you.

Jacob Olivia ([08:25](#)):

As we've worked with a lot of the school leaders that are here today, Commissioner Diaz and myself, have been on site, have been on the phone each and every single day because we know we have to act with urgency to return to normalcy for our communities and get students back into a strong learning environment as we are removing obstacles to get water out of buildings, get power restored. We started hearing stories about principals connecting with families who have lost everything. And one of the challenges that they were seeing to reopen and welcome students back is they need those high quality teachers, their support staff, their leaders to be able to come into the classroom. And they're navigating through some challenges personally. So we were able to connect with our direct support organizations, our education foundations, and start identifying, what are those opportunities that we can help create? Or what are the things we can do to get these families lives restored? And through the initiatives of the First Lady, by generating these funds and being able to be here today and be able to move these funds right to those direct support organizations, we know that they're gonna connect with the teachers that can benefit from this to most. And we're really just appreciative that we're able to be here today and make this announcement. So thank you Governor for your work in this.

Governor DeSantis ([09:42](#)):

Okay. Tracy Lorenzini is a teacher at San Carlos Park Elementary School.

Tracy Lorenzini ([09:51](#)):

Hi. I was told to share my story. My name is Tracy Lorenzini. I'm a proud educator here at San Carlos Park Elementary in the school district of Lee County. My story's important to me, but by far it's not nearly as bad as some of the other stories of my colleagues. Many stories that I've heard educators are impacted in much more severe ways than than I was. So, I guess my story is somewhere in the middle of the scope of it. But I am sharing to give all educators a voice as this hurricane has really caused a lot of hardships for our teachers, staff, and students alike. I moved to Cape Coral, Florida with my husband, who's also an educator here in Lee County. And we have two school aged children. The four of us attend four different schools here.

Tracy Lorenzini ([10:41](#)):

And we bought our house here six years ago. We lived next door to my parents and across the street from my sister. My sister's son, my nephew actually teaches here as well. So, you know, family is very important to us, and we had the chance to have our three houses close together, so it was really ideal. We woke up the morning of the storm to hear that it was going to directly hit us at Cape Coral as a category four, almost five hurricane. And our three households, there's 10 member family members total. We had a decision to make. We wanted to be all together, of course and I was fighting for all 10 of us to be in the same house in my house because it's the newest. My sister's house, however, has a second floor, and we were worried about the storm surge, so we opted to move all 10 of us.

Tracy Lorenzini ([11:31](#)):

As the storm was beginning to go all into her house, The storm was scary. We were in a closet for hours. The house shook. We had the metal shutters blow off, a window broke. My seven year old daughter was

truly traumatized as I think we all were. The next morning we walked across the street to see our house, which was missing shingles and the roof's plywood was exposed. We opened the front door and saw that the water had saturated the ceiling, and it caused a collapse in several rooms, including the living room, bedroom and bathrooms. It collapsed on the couch where all 10 of us would've been had they listened to me. So I'm very thankful that no one listened to me <laugh>. Since the storm took out our electricity, the 10 of us stayed for a few nights at my parents' house with the generator.

Tracy Lorenzini ([12:23](#)):

My sister has cystic fibrosis, so, we needed electricity for her medication in the, refrigerated medicines and the machines that she uses. That first night, we had looters come to our house, and steal gas right from the generator that was running 20 feet from where we were all sleeping. And so of course, this added to my daughter's trauma, and we decided to leave to go to Bradenton to stay with my in-laws until power was restored. We packed up our family of four on my daughter's eighth birthday, and we drove to Bradenton to find that 75 was closed due to flooding. So then we were detoured through the devastation. And that 90 minute drive took us over five hours. Not really how she envisioned how to spend her eighth birthday. The next nine days, we waited for power to be restored, and my husband and I drove back and forth from Bradenton to Cape Coral to bring supplies, install tarps, and gut the inside of our home to avoid the mold.

Tracy Lorenzini ([13:25](#)):

We left the kids with my in-laws, and we stacked up on gas and water and numerous supplies. We took down the wet drywall and insulation ourselves while waiting for insurance to call. When we finally did hear from them, the soonest that they could get to us was yesterday, three weeks after we had started the process. We haven't seen any insurance money yet. And I know that this is a slow process, but we are very fortunate to have family to lean on and stay with when many other teachers do not have this option. Educators all over Lee County have lost their homes completely beyond repair. They have lost their cars. They have lost all of their belongings, but they haven't lost hope.

Tracy Lorenzini ([14:06](#)):

I have coworkers wondering how they're going to afford their high deductibles. I have teacher friends who are continuing to pay for their mortgage while also needing to pay for rent for an apartment. Now, teachers are told that they can stay in a hotel when the nearest option is hours away. Another colleague was renting and needed to find another rental, which required security deposit first and last month's rent, while also being a smaller place with a bigger price tag. And yet, teachers are here at school, they are welcoming their students back. They are hugging them tight. They are listening to the students horribly tragic stories, with such compassion and care. They're a support system. Their kids in their classrooms, even when they are the ones that need the support system, they are selfless and have continued to give their whole heart and soul to this teaching profession, even when they feel like they have nothing else to give. Teachers are truly amazing people. So, thank you today for giving educators a voice with this press conference. There are so many stories, very heartbreaking stories. I feel very thankful for my circumstances and I find that, there's many more teachers that are still in dire need of support. So thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([15:31](#)):

Okay. Jennifer Vigne, President CEO Education Foundation of Sarasota County and membership chair for the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations.

Jennifer Vigne ([15:44](#)):

Good morning everyone, and thank you governor for the introduction. As the membership chair, I'm proud to be representing, the 64 local education foundations across the state of Florida that really work in direct alignment with the school districts across the state. We focus very much on innovating, learning, powering potential, and celebrating the success of wonderful teachers and educators. We've also, unfortunately, become great task masters at servicing the counties when it comes to hurricane relief. And so we're here today both with a great level of responsibility, but also with humility in knowing what's in front of us. We want to acknowledge, first of all that as a membership organization, we raise annually 83 million dollars each year to support nearly 98% of the students across the state of Florida. And it is an incredible honor as the consortium of Florida Education Foundations to work with educators across our state.

Jennifer Vigne ([16:49](#)):

This moment today, though, we've also learned the paradoxical ability that storms have on us. And that is the ability to both cause great devastation, but also have the great capacity to unite our community. And it is through that vein that we're working to unite our community as educator champions. We have taken a front row seat and seeing the educators, as you've just heard, how they have taken their care and compassion and put those needs of students and others far beyond the needs of themselves. They have shown up, they've stood and delivered time and time again to care for and to educate our next generation of leaders. And so we are proud to be able to receive this incredible generosity, from the Governor's office and Lady DeSantis to support that effort. And so on behalf of the Florida, the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, we want to thank Governor DeSantis and Lady DeSantis for this great gift that, again, we know schools can be rebuilt, bridges can be replaced, cars will come again. But the capacity to restore hope, bringing the resiliency to educators back into the classroom to do what they do best is priceless. And so from all of us, thank you Governor and Lady DeSantis for this incredible gift.

Governor DeSantis ([18:21](#)):

Okay. Thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([18:24](#)):

Okay. We actually have the check, so if you guys want to come, Lee County.

Governor DeSantis ([19:35](#)):

Well, we're appreciative of everybody for working hard. Who's contributed to the fun, happy to be able to make a difference. And as I said, as there's additional needs in the community please reach out to our office, reach out to Florida DEM and the First Lady, and we want to make sure that we're getting the dollars where they can be the most impactful. But clearly now when you're talking about folks who are teaching, who have a lot of problems with their own households, may not even have a household anymore. If there's ways that you can do to help that, these foundations are gonna have more capacity to do so. So I think it's gonna be a great thing. The other thing, just to make clear again, I know the CDC is added the COVID shot for kids to the immunization schedule in the state of Florida.

Governor DeSantis ([20:30](#)):

That will never be a pretext for there to be a mandate of COVID shots for kids. That is the parent's decision. That is not something that is appropriate to be mandated in our schools. And so that's the law

that I signed into law, last year because we saw where this was going. And it's something that we'll continue to uphold and make sure that that's the case. So I know a lot of parents have been concerned about that. You know, just know that in Florida, you know, we're gonna protect your prerogatives and we'll continue to do that. Okay. All right. Anybody have any questions? All right. We'll be back soon. We'll see you guys. Thank you.