

## **EXPERIENCE AND RECOVERY IN HUMBLE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Dr. Roger Brown, Deputy Superintendent  
Jamie Mount, Director of Public Communications  
P.O. Box 2000, Humble, TX 77347  
Tel:281-641-1000, www.humbleisd.net

### **Introduction**

Everything was ready for the first day of school at Kingwood High School, a 6A school in suburban Houston. But on August 28, 2017, Hurricane Harvey flood waters engulfed the campus, washed fish from the San Jacinto River into hallways, and covered athletic fields and grounds with debris. The gym floor curled up and floated. The theater became full of dark, putrid water. The high school's \$1.6 million in instructional materials were destroyed, as were \$1.2 million in musical instruments and supplies. Water rose to the school's second floor. It would cost over \$67.8 million to make Kingwood High School usable again. Although damage was sustained in 20 out of 53 Humble ISD facilities, the biggest challenge was Kingwood High School. A dirty substance blanketed everything. A noxious odor permeated the 500,000 square-foot building. The campus was unsafe and unusable, potentially for the entire school year. Providing a comprehensive education for 2,700 students after losing the campus was a major challenge faced by the Humble Independent School District.

### **Objectives**

This session explains how Humble ISD:

- Undertook an aggressive timeline for gathering information, developing a plan, and continuing school with a commitment to the quality everyone expects. Schools are essential to communities and healing.
- Deployed timely and transparent communications, listening to stakeholders, to maintain and build public trust.
- Spurred innovation.

### **Flood Experience**

As Hurricane Harvey flooding began, Humble ISD focused first on saving lives. Yellow school busses, escorted by Humble ISD Police and driving up the wrong side of the street to avoid fallen trees and debris, bussed families to temporary shelters throughout the area. The district opened schools as temporary shelters. Humble ISD Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Fagen utilized her Twitter account to direct people to safety and issue calls for specialized shelter needs, such as for medical personnel. With every Tweet, people showed up within minutes to help.

Once the roads became passable, district leaders worked around the clock to develop a plan and work out many complex logistical issues for starting school. Administrators explored every possible option for Kingwood High School – from bringing in portables, to leasing community space, to moving grade levels into elementary schools and middle schools. Only one option stood to reason. Summer Creek High School, located in a still-developing part of

the district, was large enough to accommodate Kingwood's 2,700 students, 250 teachers and staff, traffic and parking. However, Summer Creek High School was not large enough to accommodate both schools at one time, so an innovative schedule would have to be developed that required shared sacrifice. Summer Creek High students would attend school in the morning and Kingwood High students would attend in the afternoon.

Ten days after flooding, Humble ISD was able to start school at 40 of its schools. Fourteen days after flooding, school began at the remaining two campuses – Kingwood High School and Summer Creek High School. Six-and-a-half months later, Kingwood High School was restored to a point where students could attend classes on their home campus.

The innovative schedule - that was met at first with anxiety– ended up being embraced and Summer Creek High School has now sought a waiver from the state to continue with a non-traditional schedule as a pilot program.



Flooded Kingwood High School -



Two High Schools Combine - 2017

### **Lessons Learned**

- Courage and vision matter. The easier solution would have been to divide all of Kingwood High School students and teachers up among the district's other four high schools. However, the Superintendent and School Board were committed to keeping alive the Kingwood High School tradition, keeping the student body together, and developing an option that allowed for electives and extra-curricular activities to continue. It took more planning, but mattered greatly in a community where many families were grieving the loss of their homes.
- Necessity spurs invention. The district was forced to operate differently due to the crisis, and there is more openness to innovation as a result of successful experiences.

- Strategic communications are necessary to build and maintain public trust. Showing off those who helped, utilizing the power of social media and video, and publicly presenting information and choices were essential.
- Foundational strength matters. Strong fiscal management and continuous training and planning in all job roles allowed Humble ISD to move forward more quickly than some other organizations.

## References

- 1)Mount, J. (2018). "Lessons in Crisis Communications." *Texas Lone Star: A Publication of the Texas Association of School Boards*, 36(2), 8-13.
- 2)Cook, G. (2017). "Lone Star Strong: Texas Schools Rebuild after Hurricane Harvey Blast." *American School Board Journal*, 14-25.
- 3)Pell, Samantha. (January 2018). "Hurricane Harvey destroyed their school. Now they share a building with their rival." *The Washington Post*.
- 4)Rhor, M. (September 2017). "In the Kingwood area, two high schools unite after Harvey to make 'best of the worst' scenario." *Houston Chronicle*.