

Katrina's Displaced School Children

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Michael Stein

Memphis, Tennessee

President, Margolin Hebrew Academy

Testimony

Good afternoon.

My name is Mike Stein and I am a senior vice president of investments for Wachovia Securities in Memphis, Tennessee. I also serve as President of the Board of Directors of the Margolin Hebrew Academy. It is in this role that I am honored to speak to you today.

The Margolin Hebrew Academy is an Orthodox Jewish day school with an enrollment of 250 students from pre-kindergarten through the twelfth grade, providing a dual curriculum of general and Judaic studies. We strive to provide a high level of academic excellence and simultaneously meet the needs of each individual student.

As we all watched the unprecedented devastation and destruction of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, we knew that many families would be evacuating to Memphis. I immediately met with our administrative staff to discuss how our school could best serve the needs of families. Our school adopted a policy of "doing whatever it takes," even though there was no way of knowing the cost and where the money would come from. During the week of August 28th, our school enrolled 24 students ranging in age from three years to 17, increasing our school current population by ten percent. Their educational, emotional and physical needs varied, and we attempted to address all of these areas, and I believe so far we have made their transition as smooth as possible under these unparalleled circumstances.

Let me share with you some of the assistance we provided:

Free tuition – no questions asked. The children were given school uniforms, textbooks, supplies and school lunches. We hired additional staff to ensure that our new students would not be left behind due to the fact that our school year began August 17th.

Psychological support – Dr. David Pelcovitz, a professor of psychology at Yeshiva University in New York, flew to Memphis to conduct sessions with the students and families from New Orleans as well as our entire staff. Dr. Pelcovitz has extensive experience in post traumatic stress treatment, including his involvement with many 9-11 families.

Our staff and parent body created a network to secure housing, clothes, food transportation and medical needs in conjunction with the Memphis Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Service.

As we all know, the needs are great and ongoing. Our school is closely monitoring the progress of each student, both educationally and emotionally. With the goal of allowing the children to adjust to their new environment, without being labeled – allowing students to be students and not “evacuees.”

I have personally been inspired by the selflessness and dedication of so many individuals in our school community as well as all across the country.

I appreciate this committee’s concern for the children of the Gulf Coast. Thank you for allowing me to share some of my experiences with you.