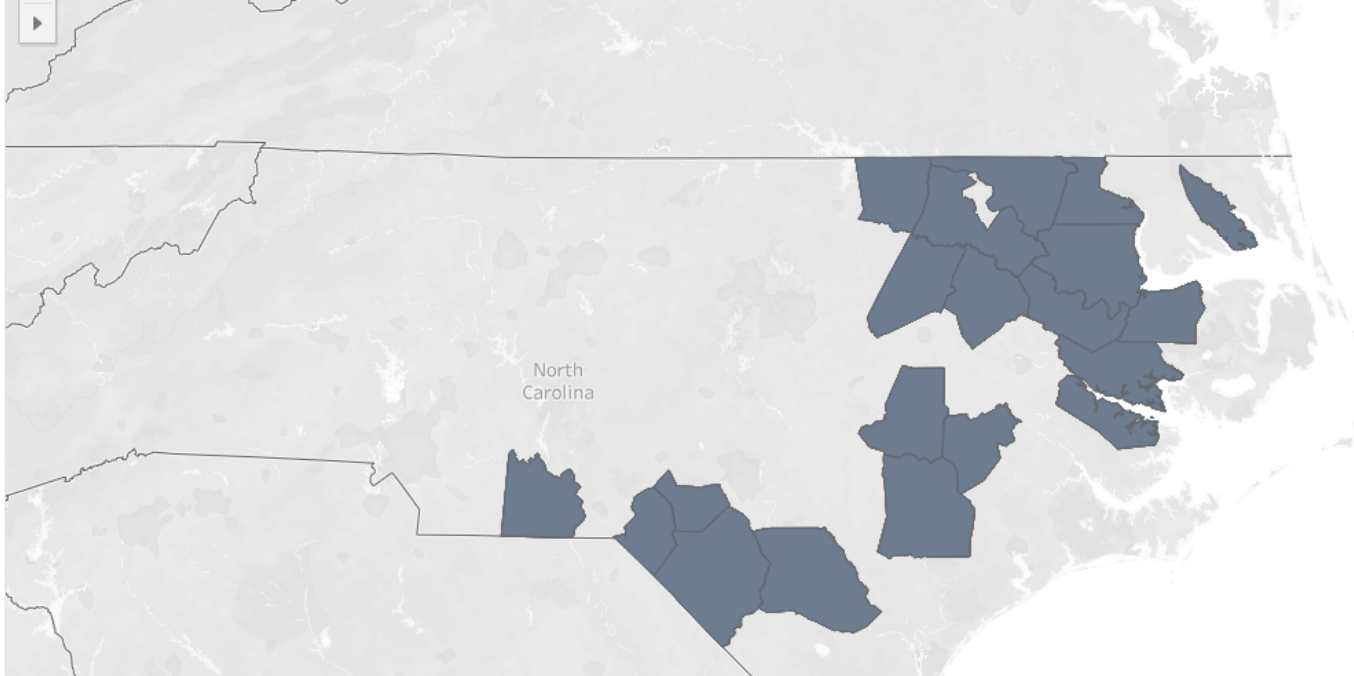


North Carolina Hurricane Disaster Preparedness



Overview

In the past two years, North Carolina encountered two disastrous hurricanes, Hurricane Dorian and Hurricane Florence. When up against a natural disaster, coastal school districts have shown immense strength due to their community's resiliency and motivation. However, regardless of their motivation, some districts require more help than others. While mapping where hurricanes have landed in the past five years, I highlighted which North Carolina School districts were also in the bottom quartile for educational performance. Surprisingly, school districts that were not on the coast, but rather behind coastal districts were highlighted as school districts that had low-performing educational performances.

This trend seemed peculiar given that the majority of school districts that touch the coast were still managing to perform well. After discussing how Hurricane Florence impacted elementary school teachers with Lisa Godwin, the 2017 Southeast Region Teacher of the Year, I was surprised to hear about all the actions she and her school's administration did to serve their students. During our discussion, she brought up multiple ways that the government and her community could support after a disaster. In this policy brief, I will analyze current hurricane preparedness legislation and identify actions that could be added to support teachers and coastal communities.

Literature Review

Schools Support the Community: Teachers have a strong ethical code, and findings saw that school administration performs an overwhelming amount of transactional tasks to help their students (Lane et al. 2020). In times of disasters, parents reach out to schools first when in need causing schools to naturally have a pulse on everything happening in a community during a disaster.

Mental Health Impacts: Students and teachers experience the trauma of natural disasters (Davis & Fuller 2019), and most schools do not have enough school psychologists to cater to the therapy needed for students. This leaves teachers to cover additional emotional work for students in addition to their other tasks as a teacher.

Academic Consequences: Due to time lost in the classroom, coastal students are behind in the curriculum (Pane et al. 2008). Although these areas are not held to the same academic standards as non-impacted schools, the long-term implications can be detrimental to a student's long-term education.

Discussion

In my discussions with Mrs. Godwin, we discussed how school psychologists become overwhelmed after hurricanes and could benefit from additional help after a disaster occurs.

Additionally, given that schools provide child care, parents can have time to properly situate themselves when their children are at school. Considering this, and the overall role schools have in supporting a community it would be wise to use schools as a fully equipped vehicle of support. We also discussed the little things that are often overlooked when planning for a disaster such as acquiring undamaged teaching material such as markers, papers, scissors, etc. Many teachers have to ask for donations or apply for mini-grants to replace basic supplies.



Recommendations

- As we continue to build hurricane-resistant infrastructure, we should plan to **utilize schools as a community support center** by hosting doctors, volunteers, shelters, and food pantries at weather-resistant schools. This way schools can be converted into a one-stop shop for any aid a family might require.
- **Contract therapists throughout North Carolina to be on standby for a disaster.** Similar to how state therapists provide additional aid at schools after a school shooting, a setlist of therapists can be prepared to provide additional support in hurricane-impacted schools when required.
- **Send class supply boxes to teachers that request additional supplies.** This takes the pressure off of teachers to ask for donations for basic teaching materials that are ruined after a hurricane.

References

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