

By Bill Husfelt

Superintendent, Bay District Schools

By the time you read this, our relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Ida will be well underway and I'd like to take some time this week to focus on the positive, amazing things our students and staff are accomplishing together. Bay District Schools and the rest of our community will never forget all of the help we received from around that world after Michael.

Hopefully you've heard by now that our Bay High School Student Government Association students are raising funds for Mercy Chefs through the sale of \$2 rubber bracelets. You may remember that Mercy Chefs was one of the first organizations to come to our community after Hurricane Michael and they were one of the last to leave. They served millions of hot meals here and coordinated the delivery of thousands of boxes of food to those in need. They are doing the same in Louisiana and have already served a record breaking 23,000 meals in just one day. With 14 distribution sites open throughout Louisiana they are truly "feeding the need" and we appreciate and admire them so much. If you'd like to support this effort, please reach out to Bay High School (850.767.4600) to purchase a bracelet.

Bay High's efforts are being supported by students from all of our secondary schools and also by fundraisers from C and G Sporting Goods and History Class ... both downtown businesses who are also raising money for Mercy Chefs.

Additionally, several other schools either collected supplies for distribution in Louisiana or collected funds. A. Crawford Mosley High School students sent a full truckload of desperately-needed supplies earlier this week and Southport Elementary and Deer Point Elementary collaborated on a huge collection of "comeback coolers" which are coolers stuffed with all sorts of supplies needed to recover after a severe storm. Lynn Haven Elementary students are currently collecting "Nickels for New Orleans" and we know several other schools are also doing what they can.

The spirit of giving and support is very active in our community and nowhere was that more evident than at a recent football game at Joe and Jeannette Chapman Field at Tommy Oliver Stadium.

Concerned over a recent adolescent fighting in the area around the stadium parking lot that had NOTHING to do with the schools playing or our student athletes, we ramped up security for the game last week and limited attendance to students of the schools participating only. All other students were required to be accompanied by parents/guardians.

Between the increased security and heavy law enforcement presence, I am pleased to report that nothing untoward happened at the game and we hope to continue that pattern for the rest of the season.

We reached out to several community leaders to have them post something on social media to ask the parents to make sure that they knew that students (not associated with the schools playing) would not be admitted alone. Several leaders helped immensely. Leaders like Tony Bostick made a video imploring parents to supervise their children and he didn't stop there. He came to the game to walk around with other community members and encourage the students! Community groups also reached out to parents to implore them to help us help their students!

Those extra eyes and ears were a very positive influence on the young people and a great example of 'partnerships' that we all need to remind ourselves about. We are SO grateful for their support.

If we work together, I am confident we can teach our children right from wrong and we can ensure that our school and community events are safe places where young people can gather, have fun and stay out of trouble. It truly does take a village, however, and we're very grateful for the participation and support of leaders like Tony Bostick.

We also appreciate all of the continued assistance and encouragement we get from our trusted partners and from members of our community. It's a challenging time to be in education but there's no doubt in my mind that our talented and passionate BDS employees are doing all they can to support our children, and each other, through every obstacle. Their work, however, is made exponentially easier when we have the support of our community and when good citizens take the time to put actions behind their words.

Thank you Bay County for helping us take great care of our children. We appreciate you and we hope you continue to stay safe.

God Bless!