

La Porte ISD Earns A+ for Mitigation Techniques

La PORTE, TX – If grades were given for mitigation efforts, the La Porte Independent School District would receive an A+ on the mitigation report card.

“Our mission is more than education, but to keep everyone safe,” a statement echoed and promised by Lloyd Graham, Superintendent of La Porte Independent School District. “It was lessons learned from previous hurricanes that motivated the school district to mitigate. The La Porte Independent School District is made up of 12 schools and nearly 7,600



Elevated Bayshore Elementary relocated 5,000 yards from Galveston Bay. *Photo courtesy of FEMA/Pamela Campbell*

The high school and district office overlook the bay located only 400 yards away making them prime targets for hurricanes. “Given the vulnerability of the area, it is a question of when, not if, the city will be hit again by a major hurricane,” said Graham.

The district’s goal is to lessen the storm’s negative impact by implementing mitigation techniques. “The information we gained from our experience with Hurricane Ike and Rita helped us get through Harvey,” Graham added.

The school district closed for several weeks after Hurricane Ike in 2008. One school was damaged so badly that demolition was the best option. “Hurricane Ike affected every school in the district. However, since that time, every building that we have has been touched with major or minor renovations that involved mitigation efforts,” said Deputy Superintendent Mike Clausen.

In 2005, after Hurricane Rita, city voters passed a \$205 million construction bond. Years later in 2014, a \$260 million construction bond passed with up to \$38 million dollars earmarked for mitigation.

From elevation, to demolition and relocation, targeted schools mitigated. In 2010, Bayshore Elementary previously overlooked Galveston Bay but was demolished and relocated approximately one mile away to an area ten feet above the base flood elevation. The new school was hardened with wind-resistant glass to sustain 140 mile-per-hour winds and a modified bitumen roof installed to meet higher standards. The district equipped the school with a generator that provides power to the entire school in case of a power outage.

Other examples of mitigated schools are Leo A. Rizzo and Jennie Reid Elementary where both were renovated and hardened. James H. Baker 6th Grade Campus was also hardened and now serves as the command center for police and first responders during hurricane events.

During the day of the storm rumors surfaced on social media, that Hurricane Harvey had destroyed La Porte High School. “Counter to the social media proclamations of, ‘Rest in Peace La Porte High School,’ the school was fine after Harvey,” said Graham. “The elevation efforts proved to be a winner even as the floodwater tried to breach the campus. The school was an island, but no water seeped inside.” Graham credited the new construction that hardened and elevated the facility.



Elevated cooling towers at La Porte Junior High School.
Photo courtesy of FEMA/Pamela Campbell

“Flooding was an issue for Hurricanes Rita and Ike. We spent over \$3 million for the drainage system alone, which helps the entire community,” added Graham. A detention pond is visible as you drive up to the elevated La Porte High School.

Good communication is also a priority during a hurricane event. The district pays \$3,200 a year for satellite telephones. They keep them charged so they can communicate when everything is down. Hurricane Harvey tested their mitigation techniques, and La Porte Independent School District exhibited a superior performance. The schools received minimal damage and opened in just seven days compared to several weeks after Hurricane Ike. This small window allowed students time to return from evacuating.

We made a promise to ourselves that the next time a hurricane hit, we would have a school for our children to come back too,” said Graham. “School means stability for our kids, and we want to be the place where the children can come while everyone is recovering from the storm.”

For additional information visit:

- <https://buildingscience.com/documents/digests/bsd-111-flood-and-hurricane-resistant-buildings>
- https://www.lpisd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=360874&type=d&pREC_ID=788933
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