May 10, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, State Board of Education

FROM: Joseph B. Morton
State Superintendent of Education

RE: Tornado Visits

Beginning at 2:00 pm, Thursday, May 5, and ending at 3:30 pm, Monday, May 9, I visited the following locations:

Tuscaloosa County Board of Education
University Place Elementary, Tuscaloosa City
Alberta City Elementary, Tuscaloosa City
Holt Elementary, Tuscaloosa County
Marion County Board of Education
Hackleburg Elementary and High School, Marion County
Phil Campbell High School, Franklin County
Dekalb County Board of Education
Plainview Elementary and High School, Dekalb County
Cullman County Board of Education

Mr. Gary Warren and Dr. Charles Elliott joined in on the visits for their affected schools. Mrs. Mary Scott Hunter had an unavoidable conflict regarding Dekalb County, but she visited previous to my visit. Dr. Craig Pouncey, Deputy State Superintendent of Education, and Mr. Perry Taylor, State School Architect, joined in on the visits.

Truthfully, I have seen much devastation in my life. I was State Superintendent in 2005 when Katrina hit and also when Ivan came ashore in 2004. I was fully involved in Enterprise’s 2007 tornado and recovery, in which seven students died. I vividly recall Hurricane Frederic. However, experiencing what 47 tornadoes in one day did to our state is very hard to describe. Fortunately, there were no fatalities at any school, but school personnel and student lives were lost, along with approximately 250 others.
I read in Monday’s *Birmingham News* that 10,000 homes had been totally or partially destroyed. I cannot find a count on businesses and industries, but I have seen many that are now just rubble. Some students and their families are in the following situations: their school was destroyed, their church was destroyed, their home was destroyed, their cars/trucks were destroyed, they have relatives that died, they have no place to live, and they own only what is on their backs. Many in our state are hurting. I have given to various charities and will give some more, as I know you will. Physical recovery from injuries will probably be the quickest recovery. Mental recovery will be slow for many. Recovery of a house and a job will be long-term if ever for some. I know we will keep all affected in our prayers daily. School folks, all of Alabama, plus so many more are helping with the pain and suffering each and every day.

S.B. 271 has offered some needed relief to affected schools now and for future days that will be lost due to future catastrophic events. It is a worthy bill. For your information, there have been no rejections of requests that meet the criteria.

I hope to see each of you Wednesday evening and Thursday morning.

JBM: LKM