

# Local schools rally to help hurricane victims

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Joy Sweeney, left, and Melanie Thompson load boxes of books destined for an elementary school in Houston. Thompson is the librarian at Thorpe Gordon Elementary School and her library served as a drop-off spot for book donations. Sweeney is a former member of the Jefferson City Public Schools Board of Education and currently serves as executive director of the Council for Drug Free Youth and is closely involved with the school district.

Even as Hurricane Irma threatened the United States coming into the weekend, local schools' relief efforts in response to Hurricane Harvey continue.

Jefferson City Public Schools

- The district-wide book drive organized by Thorpe Gordon Elementary School's librarian Melanie Thompson concluded Friday.

Thompson didn't immediately have a total for the number of books received, but she estimated Friday morning she'd received at least 70 boxes. She hadn't seen the full bulk of the donations, though, because some other school libraries still had to bring over their boxes.

Former Board of Education member Joy Sweeney picked up 25 of the 70 boxes Thursday to take to Texas; her son is moving to the Houston area.

Thompson said the 25 boxes are destined for two elementary schools in the Houston area, one of them being Royalwood Elementary in the northeast part of the metro area.

She's working on plans to get the rest of the donated books to Texas.

- Lewis and Clark Middle School Principal Sherri Thomas previously said her students' partnership with Goodson Middle School in Cypress, Texas, won't start major fundraising efforts until school is back in session there, which is set for Monday.

In a Sept. 1 email, Goodson Principal Sheri McCaig said she knew of at least 35 students and 10-12 staff members who were flooded out of their homes. The school

sustained damage from leaks in the roof and around doors, including to areas that had just been renovated, but the building did not flood.

Thomas forwarded another email to the News Tribune from Stephen Morton, a former Jefferson Citian who attended Belair Elementary School from 1973-77. Morton and his wife, Valarie, now live in Cypress, and their three daughters have attended or plan to attend Goodson.

He said his family was fortunate to have had their home stay dry despite the floodwater on their street, though many other families weren't so lucky.

“Lewis and Clark Middle School’s adoption of Goodson is an incredible blessing to our community that is suffering from such a devastating storm. ... Your commitment and contribution to our community in Cypress is such an incredible life lesson for your students to help kids they don’t even know,” he said in gratitude to JCPS.

- Belair Elementary had its own fundraiser last week in the form of a coin drive. Principal Elizabeth Milhollin said Friday was the last day for collection, and she would provide students with a total Monday.

Milhollin added she would like to donate the money to a school in the Houston Independent School District — the largest district in Texas and one of the largest in the country.

- Cedar Hill Elementary School allowed its students to wear a hat to school Wednesday in exchange for a donation to their own Harvey relief coin drive. Principal Stacy Fick said they raised about \$300 to be donated to the American Red Cross.

- Pioneer Trail Elementary Principal Scott Salmons said for every dollar students and staff donate to the Red Cross’ hurricane relief effort this coming week, a heart with the purchaser’s name will be placed in the school’s “Hallway of Character” — hence the name of the effort, “GrayWolves Have Heart.”

- Some Thomas Jefferson Middle School students are organizing to raise money for the needs of pets following Harvey. Three groups of advisory class students, 45-60 students all together, plan to fundraise for the Austin Pets Alive shelter in Austin.

The shelter has helped 2,000 animals find safety after the storm, and its website Friday said the shelter’s two permanent and one temporary locations currently have a record 1,000 animals in foster homes.

Thomas Jefferson sixth-grade science teacher Bridget Eisterhold said she and fellow teachers Kathy Zumwalt and Sarah Muenks organized the effort; every teacher in the school has an advisory class, which is a 25-minute homeroom-type class every other day, wherein Eisterhold said students get to know each other better, collaborate and talk about issues.

“You don’t hear a whole lot about the animals,” she said of the needs of pets in Harvey’s aftermath — stranded in their flooded homes or having to be abandoned by families before being allowed admission into shelters.

In addition to collecting monetary donations at school, she said students will reach out to local businesses that deal with animals. She said students will probably collect money for about two weeks starting the last week of September, and funds raised could also give aid to Florida in light of Irma.